The Grammar of Status Competition: International Hierarchies as Domestic Practice

Statuskonkurransens Grammatikk: Internasjonale Hierarkier som Innenlandsk Praksis

Paul Beaumont

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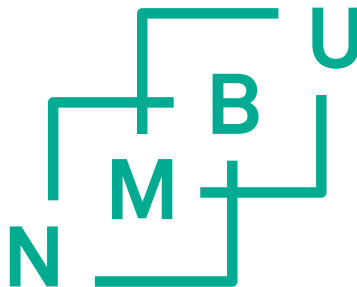
Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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Abstract

A burgeoning body of research has documented that status-seeking abounds in world politics. Yet the status hierarchies to which states respond and compete within are notoriously ambiguous and difficult to empirically ascertain. It is seldom agreed upon where states rank, even within particular policy domains. This ambiguity has begotten considerable disagreement among scholars over the nature of international hierarchies and led to a proliferation of structural theories of international status. Rather than theorizing and investigating the purported effects of fuzzy international social structures, this dissertation posits that international status can be studied via the *theories of international status* (TIS) that governments and their opponents themselves produce and use to interpret their state's status. Treating these theories as productive of the world they purport to describe, such a TIS approach foregrounds the interpretative agency of domestic groups to develop and maintain "hierarchies of their own making", which need not be recognized internationally to become crucial for policy legitimation domestically.

In order to study TIS systematically, this dissertation develops a new meta-linguistic framework for identifying and mapping the use of TIS within domestic politics. Inspired by the Copenhagen School, this *Grammar of Status Competition* framework defines status competition by its peculiar processual-relational logic rather than substantive indicators. This enables the analyst to avoid reifying the rules of the hierarchy prior to analysis, and illuminate contestation and change in the TIS that circulate and inform policy debates. Further, because TIS are manifested and observable in discourse, this approach avoids prior works' reliance upon proxies for inferring international collective beliefs. The usefulness and transferability of this approach is demonstrated via three deliberately different case studies: how rival TIS were involved in the (de)legitimation of (1) Norwegian education reforms at the turn of the 21st century; (2) the United States various negotiating positions during the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between 1969 and 1980, and (3) the prosecution of Britain's war with the Boer between 1899-1902. Among, other insights, the dissertation provides plausible answers to three major puzzles in IR status research: why states compete for status when the international rewards seem ephemeral; how states can escape the zero sum game associated with quests for positional status; and how status scholars can overcome the methodological problem of disentangling status from other motivations. Finally, the dissertation argues that ambiguity around status is itself is a social good that international society would be prudent to cherish rather than strive to eliminate.

Acknowledgments

Grappling with how to study international status has been my primary occupation since I entered my 30s. It has been a constant struggle but also an incredible privilege. The list of people who have helped me come out the other end is long. First of all, I must thank all my colleagues at Noragric for providing the optimal professional and social environment for undertaking a PhD. I am indebted to Stig Jarle Hansen for granting me this opportunity in the first place: for seeing the potential in a PhD topic that has stumped far superior minds than mine. I am also privileged to have had the opportunity to teach IR theory and later co-author with the brilliant Katharina Glaab. Our conversations over coffee, the *reflektorium*, and in our writing-sessions, have been frequently inspiring. In addition, I could not have hoped for a kinder PhD cohort: Cornelia Helmcke, Moses Majid Limuwa, Mikael Bergius, Tomohiro Harada, Erika Rojas and Eva Dögg Davíðsdóttir, in particular have helped make this job feel like a pleasure much more often than chore. Meanwhile, Bill Warner is a necessary condition for everything I have and will ever publish. Lacking his tutelage in the Writing Centre, I would never have kicked my habit of writing ~~long,~~ flabby ~~pompous~~ sentences. I would also like to thank our PhD coordinator Josie Teurlings, who has always been there to answer my (often stupid) questions and help me with both efficiency and patience.

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Beyond Ben and Kirsti, I have benefited from the wisdom and friendship of several people I consider my "surrogate supervisors". As well as laying the groundwork in IR for research

A special thanks must go to my long-suffering co-author and roommate: the scholar formerly known as ⌀, otherwise known as Dr. in-the-making, Pål Røren. I suspect I have exchanged several PhD thesis worth of Facebook messages with Pål over the last six years. Indeed, I count my lucky stars every day that I have a scholar of his calibre with whom to discuss status, IR and latterly, fatherhood. My dissertation would be immeasurably poorer without his help.

Last but certainly not least, I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Kathleen Rani Hagan, whose unremitting faith in me has been a constant solace throughout.

Contents

Acronyms

ABMs	Anti-Ballistic Missiles
ALCM	Air-Launched Cruise Missile
CPI	Country performance indicators
EU	The European Union
HC	House of Commons
HL	House of Lords
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles
IR	International Relations (the discipline)
JCS	Joint Chief of Staff
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction
MIRV	Multiple Independent Re-entry Vehicles
MP	Member of parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NIMBY	Not In my Back Yard(er)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NSC	National Security Council
NPT	Non Proliferation Treaty
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	The Programme for International Assessment
TIS	Theories of International Status
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SIT	Social Identity Theory
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles

Introduction

This dissertation contributes to the new wave of status research that has swelled the field International Relations (IR) over the course of the last decade.[1] Stripped to its core, this research agenda has set about substantiating the claim that states often pursue activities in order to improve their social status in international hierarchies and avoid activities that threaten their position. Here status is conventionally defined as "collective beliefs about a given state's *ranking* on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Larson, Paul & Wohlforth, 2014, p. 7). In particular, this research has focused on showing that status often trumps other state-interests, such as wealth and even security. To make these arguments, the pioneers of IR status research have developed various structural theories of status.[2] Simplifying, international hierarchy is theorized as a social structure to which states *respond*, given their position and/or the nature of the hierarchy.[3] The usual methodological procedure involves demonstrating that observable outcomes that appear irrational from conventional approaches become tractable if we assume a motivation for international status (rather than wealth or security). Variations on this operation have succeeded in providing compelling and theoretically sophisticated explanations for war waging (Renshon, 2016, 2017; Ward, 2013, 2017), space racing (Paikowsky, 2017), and arms races (Murray, 2010; 2018) as well as humanitarian aid (de Carvalho & Neumann, 2015; Stolte, 2015), and big science projects (Gilady, 2018). Moreover, status research has provided explanations for the activities of great powers (Neumann, 2008), small powers (Wohlforth et al., 2017), rising powers (Røren & Beaumont, 2019), across a range of historical periods (Naylor, 2018).[4]

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[1] The last decade has seen several status-focused monographs published by university presses, meanwhile status works have featured in all the top IR journals. Key works include but are not limited to: Larson and Shevchenko, (2003, 2010 & 2019); Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, (2014); Wohlforth, (2009); Volgy Volgy Corbetta, Grant Baird (2011) Renshon, (2016, 2017) Ward, (2013; 2017a, 2017b, 2019); Dafoe, Renshon, Huth, (2014); Duque (2018); De Carvalho and Neumann (2015); Wohlforth, de Carvalho, Neumann, & Leira, (2017); Lebow, (2010a); Clunan, (2009); Freedman, (2015); Wolf (2011); Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, (2014);Wolf (2019); Subotic and Vucetic, (2019) Pu (2019) Deng, (2008) Naylor, (2018) Krickovic & Chang (2020), Löwenheim (2003), Barnhart, (2020) Schulz (2017), Onea (2014) Hansen (2013).

[2] By far the two largest and longest running research agendas – Status Discrepancy Theory (Galtung, 1962; Volgy, 1995; Volgy et al, 2011; 2014), and Larson and Shevchenko's translation of Social Identity Theory (2003, 2010, 2014, Larson, 2019) – both theorise the international status hierarchy as an international structure to which states – conceived of as singular actors - respond. Also influential among pioneers of status research is Wohlforth (2009), who theorizes how variance in overall structure (polarity) affects prevalence of status competition.

[3] Mattern and Zarakol (2016, p.637) call this "the logic of positionality".

[4] The discussion (and critique) that follows pertains to research that explicitly analyses "status" or "prestige" hierarchies in international politics. I do not claim that it addresses related research agendas that study Stigma

While status scholars have proven highly adept at cataloguing instances of status seeking they have been less adept at showing how status seeking has led to higher status. Research that has addressed the question of whether status seeking works, makes sombre reading for states struggling to rise within international society. It strongly suggests the quest for status recognition in international society is usually gruelling and often unfair(see: Naylor, 2018; Ward, 2013; Pouliot, 2014 Zarakol, 2010). History stacks the deck in favour of early entrants to international society, who having established the rules of game on their terms, can move the goalposts, and generally gatekeep with little justice or consistency. Even model members of international society can expect a long slog before they acquire higher status (Beaumont & Røren 2020; Røren 2015). Even worse for status seekers, recent work suggests that while status *seeking* is ubiquitous in world politics,[5] the quest is theoretically prone to prove futile (Mercer, 2017). The argument runs that because status is relative, other states have built in incentives to discount good performance, hold back recognition, and thus preserve their own status position.[6] According to Mercer (2017,p.168), alleged gains from seeking-status are psychological illusions and he thus recommends that policymakers cease trying to "chase what you cannot catch". Ultimately, these findings paint a depressing picture for status seekers but also present a puzzle: why is status seeking so prevalent in international relations when the rewards are so ephemeral and perhaps illusionary? Mercer's solution is that status seeking is in fact an irrational pathology that states will eventually learn to give up. Here, I seek provide an alternative answer that does not require governments past and present to have been fools. Moreover, my theoretical solution opens up an important new vector for studying the influence of status on world politics: investigating "international" status as a domestic practice, one that can (de)legitimate both domestic and international policies regardless of whether international audiences recognise that status. [7]

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and/or Ontological Security, which share some commonalities and often mention status, but constitute discrete (and highly insightful) research agenda's in their own right. Serious cross pollination of these agendas with status would be welcome, but it would take a PhD dissertation alone to do so properly. For key works on stigma see: Zarakol 2010a. Adler-Nissen 2014; for key works on Ontological Security see: Steele, (2008), Mitzen (2006)

[5] While there is disagreement about just about everything else, a growing consensus among IR scholars exists that states and leaders are often obsessed with status and that status matters a great deal in world politics (Dafoe, et al. 2014).

[6] Mercer's article has several theoretical and methodological problems (chapter V), but a weak version of his thesis still holds: that the gains from status in terms of recognition are so diffuse and difficult to perceive that the energy that states exert seeking status remains puzzling.

[7] I have put *international* in inverted commas here because I as my dissertation actually investigates domestically produced *representations* of international hierarchy and international status.

Expressed at its boldest, I theorize that it is possible for states to construct, compete in, and win status competitions of their own making. Citizens can take pride and governments can generate legitimacy from topping a "status" hierarchy without international audiences being party to the hierarchy in question.[8] Put more humbly, I suggest that states have varying degrees of leeway to *develop* and *maintain* competitive hierarchical constructions of the world that are not actively shared or recognized by international audiences, yet remain salient and have political effects domestically. As a result, governments can enjoy benefits of status seeking in terms of legitimacy, without being beholden to international recognition. This has been overlooked, I will argue, because prior works have tended to bracket the domestic audience and thus overstate the degree of inter-subjective agreement about international status and understate the degree of interpretative agency located within domestic discourses. Moreover, if this were the case, it would provide a theoretically informed answer for how states could "compete" for positional status without it manifesting in a zero sum game. It would also help explain why states undertake what look like wasteful status-quests, despite international recognition being so difficult to come by.

If this sounds outlandish, consider Benedict Anderson's (1991) famous claim that the nation is an imagined community comprised of the stories that people tell about their collective self. Crucially, these narratives need not be empirically accurate, nor accepted and recognised by other imagined communities for them to inform, inspire and legitimate collective action on behalf of that community. Indeed, unlike people, states contain people and social groups that can provide *both* source for narratives *and* sites of recognition for those same narratives. For instance, several countries' lay claim to an exceptionalism that would not travel far beyond the members of their community, yet these representations of the nation's *position* – exceptional compared to the unexceptionals – are often intimately imbricated in these countries' domestic politics of legitimation.[9] While Anderson does not mention it, it is a short jump from being able to imagine one's community progressing through time and space to imagining communities competing in a hierarchy.[10] How we can identify and study systematically these imagined "international" hierarchies, as they become manifested and

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[8] This theoretical possibility is unlikely to be realised in practice, though North Korean citizens may come pretty close to this.

[9] Perhaps the most well-known, are the US, Russia, China, and Israel, but if one looks close enough, most countries national narrative contains elements of exceptionalism. See: Restad (2014) for a compelling illustration of why narratives of exceptionalism matter in international politics.

[10] These national narratives depend upon the "idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time" and thus allow it to be "conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history", (Anderson, 1991, p 26).

contested in domestic discourse, together with how they affect political processes, is the theoretical contribution of this dissertation. The next section reviews the extant status literature to develop the theoretical warrant for this approach by explaining how I build upon but also depart from prior works, especially those that have theorized how domestic processes inform international status seeking.

Prior Work: The Trouble with Structural Theories of Status

In the last decade, status research has emerged from the shadows of IR, where it had hitherto dwelt as an ad-hoc explanation of last resort (Eyre and Suchman, 1996, p.72), to become a vibrant and sophisticated research agenda in its own right (Paul et al. 2014; Dafoe et al. 2014; Wohlforth, 2019, p.2). Yet, this new wave of status research should be understood as a return rather than wholly new enterprise. Indeed, status research has a long and strong pedigree in IR. Classic thinkers such as Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli all recognized status, or close synonyms as an important driver of "man", while Hans Morgenthau and Robert Gilpin considered prestige to be integral to great power politics (see de Carvalho & Neumann 2014, p.2).[11] Over the last half century, the aforementioned intellectual heritage has been buttressed by social-psychology, evolutionary-biology, neuroscience, and economics research that demonstrates that individuals often forego prosperity and even security to pursue higher social status for them and their group (Paul, et al. 2014). Building upon these foundations, the first movers to theorize status in IR in the 21st century have primarily theorized how the nature of the international hierarchy and a state's position within it encourage or trigger particular types of status seeking behaviours (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016, p.639-641).

Yet as strong as IR Status research's microfoundations may be, translating theories designed for either humans or groups that operate *within* a domestic society onto states within international society presents tricky theoretical and methodological challenges (Wohlforth, 2009, p. 34-38). The difficulty is most apparent if we treat status seeking as process rather than as a discrete response to structure. Stripping it down to its most basic form (whether individual, group or state), status seeking can be reduced to a simple continuous process:

 (1) an actor assesses their status in a hierarchy of other actors

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[11] The status discrepancy research agenda inspired by Jonas Galtung (1962) burned only briefly in the early 70s (Wallace, 1970; 1973; East, 1972). However, this approach has been rekindled – with some success - recently by Volgy and various colleagues (2011; 2014), and Renshon, (2016; 2017)

(2) the actor responds to their status position by seeking-status in a particular manner

(3) upon undertaking the status seeking activity, the actor receives recognition of their new status position and the process begins afresh

IR Status research has proven extremely successful at empirically documenting stage two in the process, which is usually the dependent variable.[12] Such is IR's predilection, the earliest status theories concentrated on explaining great power war as a type of status seeking: as an attempt to overthrow the international hierarchy itself and remake the rules granting them more favourable status and institutional privileges (e.g. Gilpin, 1983); a rational strategy, whereby war is sensible response to the international hierarchy which systematically rewards war-wagers with more recognition[13] (e.g. Renshon, 2016; 2017; arguably Ringmar, 1996); the bubbling up of frustration born from international society's lack of recognition that leads to states lashing out (e.g. Volgy, et al, 2011; 2014). Beyond war, status research has recently expanded the range of stage two outcomes to different types of state and other status seeking policies. For instance, Wollforth and colleagues (2017) suggest small states seek status by being the best at doing good. Stage two also encompasses attempts to *reform* the rules of the hierarchy. IR's translation of Social Identity Theory (SIT—Tajfel and Turner, 1978) theorizes how states dissatisfied with their status may attempt to redefine a quality in a positive manner such that international society is persuaded to grant the actor higher status (Larson and Shevchenko, 2003; 2010; 2014; 2019). Thus social creativity should be understood as an attempt at revisionism but without violence. Here socially creative states wish to reform the rules, but they know what the rules are – and thus where they stand - in the first place. At this point, stage two enjoys firm empirical support (Ward, 2017, p. 38, Wohlforth, 2019, p.2): once IR scholars began looking, they spotted status seeking everywhere.

Yet, stages one and three are seldom *empirically* investigated, but glossed over in both theory and analysis:[14] Rather than investigating how actors actually *assess* their status, IR scholars have tended to make that assessment on their behalf (Mercer, 2017, p.138; see also Wolf, 2019), and set about theorizing and operationalizing how various sorts of international

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[12] Though not always: see Duque, (2018); Røren & Beaumont (2019)

[13] Given the pernicious policy implication it is important to note that Ward (2020) has shown that this finding melts upon scrutiny of Renshon's methods.

[14] This is not true of status discrepancy scholarship, however, the proxies that are used to measure recognition – counting and ranking the number of diplomatic embassies a state receives – are at best crude (Røren & Beaumont, 2019, p.5-6).

hierarchy produce different types of stage 2 outcome.[15] For Larson and Schevchenko (2003; 2010; 2014;2019), it is the legitimacy and permeability of the international hierarchy that matters, Wohlforth (2009) theorizes how variance in polarity affects status competition; status discrepancy research theorizes how difference between recognition and "objective" status attributes produce different responses (Volgy, et al, 2011; 2014; Renshon, 2016; 2017). What all these approaches share is that there is such a thing as "collective beliefs about a given state's *ranking* on valued attributes" and that states thus know their status in the international hierarchy, even if they may consider it unfair and wish to revise it. Indeed, as Mercer notes traditional status theories assume that "actors and observers will agree on what constitutes prestige, and they will update their beliefs about prestige accordingly. A state might believe that other states underestimate its prestige, but everyone knows who has how much prestige." (Mercer, 2017, p.138). Thus, although logically prior to any status seeking strategy (stage 2 outcome), states ability to assess their own status – at stage 1 and 3— has mostly been treated as unproblematic.[16]

This background assumption provides the premise and the promise of a truly structural theory of international status seeking, one where "international" or factors external to a given state can be used as an independent variable. If states did share a common understanding of the international status hierarchy, then if scholars could just get a sound enough theory of how states respond to variation in that hierarchy, it could explain and predict when particular types of status seeking will obtain.[17] Moreover, this assumption underpins a crucial methodological shortcut for studying status: because every state is presumed to understand their position in a given international status hierarchy, there is no need to empirically investigate (or theorize) how different states perceive the very nature of the hierarchy itself. Thus, rather than empirically investigating how individual states *assess* their status, the

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[15] Notably, Renshon explicitly backs up this assumption that states know their status by citing research that people who interact have a (surprisingly) good grasp of their in-group's status. Renshon uses this to underpin his assumption that leaders of states understand where their state stands in the international status hierarchy (Renshon, 2017, p.50-51). This dissertation's argument does not directly contradict Renshon because it concerns discursive theories about international status within domestic politics, rather than individual leaders' comprehension of their state's international status. It would be quite possible that a leader's private view and public expressions about international status diverge.

[16] An exception among those I just mentioned is Wohlforth (2009), which theorizes how ambiguity about status prompts status competition. Yet Wohlforth's ambiguity concerns only ambiguity produced by states ranking above one another in different valued attributes selected by Wohlforth. Thus, Wohlforth has already determined that states agree upon three key dimensions of status are and *how* these various attributes should be counted and ranked.

[17] To be sure, it would be very handy for status scholars if shared-intersubjective agreement about the international status hierarchy did indeed exist. It would render status research more practical for scholars lacking unlimited time and babel fish.

scholar theorizes it on their behalf with the goal of explaining their *response* to their position in a pre-existing and well-understood international hierarchies (Zarakol, 2017, p.12).

Yet, at the same time as positing the existence of international social structure to which all states have access, the same scholars also insist status is perceptual, contextual and inter-subjective. Thus, to posit an (international) structural theory of status it demands that states agree upon the "valued attributes" *and* interpret other states' collective beliefs about those attributes accurately enough to gage their position. This assumption is rendered potentially plausible—leaving the structural aspirations of status theories intact—via simplifying assumptions about who or what does the assessing: realism-inspired models treat the state as unitary (e.g. Khong, 2019); SIT-based approaches (tacitly) anthropomorphize the state[18]; some theorize that the leader experiences and acts upon status concerns (e.g. Renshon, 2017,p.41-42; Dafoe & Caughe, 2016); while others "zoom in" on diplomats field of practice (e.g. Pouliot, 2014; 2016; Røren 2019).[19] While all four approaches imply quite different explanations of status seeking, they all address the challenge of inter-subjective agreement about status by abstracting away or bypassing any disagreement *within the state* about either stage 1, or 3 in the status-seeking process outlined above. There is nothing a-priori wrong with simplifying assumptions and it would be certainly useful if we could study status without getting our hands dirty with the domestic, but it does beg the question: To what extent does excluding domestic audiences, actors, and processes, from theories of international status matter?

Domesticating International Status

This dissertation argues that it matters a lot. In fact, I argue the solution to the puzzle outlined above – why do states seek status with such vigour when the rewards seem so ephemeral – is located in status scholars underappreciation of the double interpretative role of domestic actors in stage 1 and stage 3. As I will argue below, contests within domestic discourse shape a states' own understanding of what its international status is prior to any

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[18] Or at least the many works that use Larson and Shevchenko's translation of SIT. Ward (2017b; 2019) explicitly brings the individual back. I will discuss this research below.

[19] Pouliot's (2014; 2016) is less a simplifying assumption than a different level of analysis. However, it is relevant here because it can be understood as a – very effective on its own terms - means of overcoming the ontological problem presented by trying to investigate "international" status.

status related policy outcome *and* again in the evaluation of that strategy.[20] Crucially, as I will show in the chapters that follow, domestic actors do not necessarily agree about what status *is* and thus their state's status, let alone align with international audiences. Indeed, bringing in the domestic and investigating status seeking as a *process*, I argue can both solve the aforementioned puzzle and underpin a new framework for analyzing the domestic production and contestation of "international" status and how these processes affects policy outcomes. In so doing, I build upon recent moves in status research, in which scholars have begun to illuminate the analytical cost of treating the state as unitary or human and assuming that states share and respond to a common understanding of international hierarchies.

More than Vanity: Status and Legitimacy

Beginning with the former, recent works have shown how treating the state as unitary or like a human cuts occludes a crucial mechanism encouraging governments to seek status: to bolster domestic legitimacy. Indeed, without paying attention to domestic legitimacy one could easily reach Jonathon Mercer's conclusion that scholars must resort to using "vanity to explain prestige policies" (2017, p. 168). Yet, unpacking the state, Steven Ward develops a more satisfying mechanism (2017a, p.37-38 & 2017b). Critiquing IR's popular translation of SIT,[21] Ward (2017b) draws attention to the original SIT, which suggests individuals may dis-identify with the in-group if they cannot make positive status comparisons with outgroups. Indeed, as the pioneers of SIT in social psychology Tajfel and Turner (1978, p.44) note, where possible, "low status may tend, in conditions of unsatisfactory social identity, to promote the widespread adoption of individual mobility strategies". This is bad news for a low status social *group*:

> Insofar as individual mobility implies disidentifaction…[which can] create obstacles to mobilizing group members for collective action over their common interests. Thus the low morale that follows from negative social identity can set in motion disintegrative processes… (Tajfel and Turner 1978, p.44)

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[20] As I alluded to above and explain in more depth in chapter II, this does not imply status is subjective: the people within a group (in this case the state) are still subjects, and their discussions of their own status are still inter-subjective

[21] Developed by Larson and Schevchenko (2003, 2010, 2014; Larson, 2019) they rework the original social psychology theory for states. Whereas in the original one of the status seeking strategies involves individuals leaving their group, in the translation all strategies become group strategies. This cuts off both analytical possibilities of studying the effects of status seeking at the domestic level (Ward, 2017b, 2019).

It should be apparent why this would immediately be relevant to states. Put simply, mobilizing citizens for collective action over their common interests is a pretty good definition of the state's purpose, not least during war. Ignoring this would be justifiably if people had no option but to identify with the state (as most status research tacitly tends to presume) but given the existence of secessionist movements in many if not most states, this is not something a "rational" state can afford to ignore.[22] But beyond SIT and maintaining the self-esteem, citizens may value international status for realist reasons or perhaps they may merely see rank in a particular activity as a good measure of their government's competence. Regardless of the precise reason, if citizens value international status, then seeking it becomes a matter of domestic legitimacy,[23] and status-seeking a prudent part of statecraft rather than mere "vanity" (e.g. Mercer, 2017). This implies that international status can and does become implicated in domestic political debates about the legitimacy of the government, and can be understood as a "political resource that influences domestic contests over foreign policy." (Ward, 2017, p.4) My approach here takes from Ward the notion of international status can become a an important political resource for (de)legitimation of a government and its policies, and that we can thus study how international status informs policy outcomes via domestic debates (see also Clunan, 2009 & 2014).[24] However, I depart quite radically from Ward's "second image reversed" approach, which suggests that acts of international recognition or denial are crucial for influencing a state's status strategy (Clunan, 2019, p. 27).

Individual versus Identity Formation

Indeed, although Ward is critical of status theories that anthropomorphize the state, in maintaining the primacy of *international* recognition (lack thereof) in his theory, Ward reproduces a widespread[25] yet dubious assumption that collective identity or status formation

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[22] But even if secessionist movements are not plausible, it may lead to an individual identifying more strongly with other group-identities available: religious, supra-national (e.g. EU), family or clan (etc).
[23] Ward, (2013; 2017; 2019); Pu and Schweller (2014); Sambanis, Skaperdas, & Wohlforth, (2015) are also relevant.
[24] My approach shares similarities with Ann Clunan's (2009, 2014), which also theorizes and illustrates how anthropomorphizing the state occludes from view important *domestic contestation* over what status seeking strategy a state should pursue. She shows how status strategies are not only formed in response to the international hierarchy, but must prove consonant with domestic elites' conception of their state's historic role too. I follow Clunan in granting the domestic discourse (and thus history) an independent role in explaining status seeking activities. However, while Clunan theorizes how elites contest a particular status strategy, she does not problematize how those elites may contest what status is or what status the state has in the first place.
[25] While status scholars disagree about many aspects of status seeking it is largely taken for granted that for state status-seeking to be successful – and thus generate the gains potentially available for status seeking - it requires that states achieve internationally *recognized* status. Indeed, this assumption is found in de Carvalho,

works the same way as individual identity or status formation (e.g Ringmar, 1996; Michelle Murray, 2018). To be sure, at the individual level, short of insanity, humans cannot claim a status or identity that at least some of their peers do not recognize: one cannot go around for very long believing they are a great stand-up comedian without people laughing. Yet, this requirement for recognition from Others cannot just be scaled up to groups (Abizadeh, 2005, p.56-58). In short, when scholars translate individual theories of identity formation onto collectives, they overlook how "the sources of recognition and dialogue required in the formation of a collective identity need not be humans excluded from membership" of the community in question (Abizadeh, 2005,p. 58). In other words, because collective identities are shared by individual *people*, the processes of self-construction and mutual recognition of collective identities can take place discursively among members *within* that *same* group. Or for that matter, recognition could come from dissimilar entities that are neither states nor individuals within the group. In the IR context, this might be IOs, NGOs or even transnational terrorist groups: any individual or group that can communicate can plausible contribute to identity recognition. Indeed, this is no less inter-subjective because it involves members of the same group and is thus quite different from the stand-up comedian who *subjectively* convinces themself they are funny. Following Abizedah (2005) then, it becomes theoretically possible that while sane individuals cannot recognize their own status, states have plenty of humans and other internal-actors that can recognize and reproduce salient representations of its international status, that the state can act upon, without requiring the Other's recognition to bring it into being (contra for instance, Murray, 2018, p.6-7).

Further, although the conventional assumption in SIT-based IR status literature is that external recognition determines the success of a status strategy, it does not find support in SIT proper.[26] The original SIT suggests that "social creativity" strategies only requires that individuals can find socially valuable attributes to make *positive comparisons* possible for people who identify with a particular social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 40-43). Although it is desirable that the out-group recognize these qualities and improve "real" status position, it is not

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and Neumann's Weberian inspired approach (2015, p.16), Michelle Murray's symbolic interactionist theory of status (2018, p.6), and it holds for Larson and Schevchenko's SIT-inspired theory of status seeking. According to Larson and Shevchenko, "To be successful" a status seeking strategy (mobility, creativity, competition), "requires that the higher-status group *accept* and *recognize* the aspiring group's improved position." (2014, p.41 – my emphasis)

[26] It is also relevant, given its salience in IR status works (e.g. Gilady, 2018), that in Thurstein Veblen's seminal *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), the locus of status competition is "invidious comparisons" rather than recognition.

necessary to generating self-esteem and pride from those intergroup comparisons. Indeed, as Tajfel and Turner make clear, pursuing social creativity, group members "may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation. *This need not involve any change in the groups actual social position*" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 p. 43 my emphasis). Crucially, social creativity does *not* require the *out*group to agree on the comparative dimensions of social value (p.40). Indeed, as Ann Clunan (2019, p.17) notes in review of Ward (2017), "social creativity strategies can actually improve the self-esteem of low-status groups even when their social position remains the same."

Collectively, this short discussion demands the domestic audience be taken into account. Bringing in the domestic provides a crucial reason for seeking status in the first place: state legitimacy. Thus, any government with citizens that value their state's position in the world in a given activity (or overall), has at least some incentive to seek to maintain or improve that position. Second, contra the conventional wisdom in prior status literature, I argued that domestic actors can serve as independent sources of recognition for their own status seeking activities, and thus international recognition need not be crucial to whether a status seeking strategy is a success. If this reasoning is correct and the domestic actors take on a significant role in both incentivising status seeking and potentially operating as an independent audience of recognition, then it would have the downstream the consequence of putting severe pressure upon the assumption that states share and act upon common understandings of international status hierarchies. If individual leaders and diplomats might be expected to have a sense of their state's international place, it seems more doubtful that the average citizen will. Although it may seem fairly obvious, it is worth spelling out exactly why agreement over the "valued attributes" that are said to constitute international status hierarchies seems unlikely to obtain.

Obstacles to Agreement about International Status Hierarches

It requires considerably more discursive labour for a social hierarchy among groups to become agreed upon than individual people. To understand why this is so it is useful to lean on Vincent Pouliot's sociological explanation of how hierarchies emerge. Pouliot (2014) argues that status hierarchies and status concerns are a function of sociality itself. In short, because people are born into societies in which comparisons with those around them are unavoidable, status hierarchies quickly emerge through practice. Pouliot (2014, 2016) uses this rationale to "zooms" in on the endogenously produced hierarchies that structure diplomats' field of practice. I concur with Pouliot's point that socially meaningful hierarchies

emerge, change and are sustained by (discursive) practice.[27] However, states are clearly not social in the way people are. Unlike a community of humans, comparisons between states – that are a necessary condition for status competition—need considerable social and technological labour in order for just *comparison* to become possible in the first place. In short, comparisons are only made possible once they are conceived of, and the technology for measuring and comparing became available and legitimated. Given that global comparisons are a logical pre-requisite to making even a crude social hierarchy within which one can have a status (Onuf, 1989, p.264-267), this implies that status hierarchies among states emerge in a quite different manner than people.[28]

Moreover, beyond the sheer difficulty in making comparisons between states, international society lacks a referee – or in Pouliot's terminology "symbolic hegemon"— to set and enforce the rules of the status hierarchy. Absent a referee, rules of the game, and a formalised system of recognition – like one finds in the Olympics—citizens have considerable interpretative leeway to interpret their states' status position in a manner that diverges from their international and indeed their domestic peers. Indeed, status researchers' "valued attributes" do not reveal themselves to the observer ready-ranked. Just as a Louis Vuitton bag can mark out its owner as stylish or stupid depending on the social context, so too can a nuclear weapon symbolize greatpowerdom but also pariah status. This inter-subjective agreement upon the rules of hierarchy—for instance, how to value nuclear weapons—is a precondition to knowing one's status position in a given context. This matters because to know *how* to compete for status, one must know the rules of the competition, otherwise, to borrow a phrase, one may end up castling with a queen.

Indeed, recent works have directly cast doubt upon the plausibility of the assumption of inter-state agreement about status. Indeed, as Joshua Freedman (2015) has convincingly argued, states may hold different "ontologies" of status recognition, which helps explain how China's status dissatisfaction and status seeking can be squared with its ostensibly high status in international society (see: Røren & Beaumont 2019). If Freedman theorizes how *states* can

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[27] I reject the distinction between "practice" and "discourse": the linguistic emphasis of discourse analysts is a methodological choice of how to get at meaning, not a rejection of the meaning-producing quality of "material" practices. Indeed, as I discuss in chapter II, properly understood, saying *is* doing in discourse analysis. Indeed, my notion of discourse is derived from Foucault, whose empirical work emphasises meaning producing material practices as well as linguistic analyses. See also Epstein (2015).

[28] Moreover, while individuals within a domestic society receive constant feedback about their group's social status, the same cannot be said for the country-status. Instead – besides diplomats and leaders – citizens will generally encounter other people from other nationalities in contexts providing them with advantages over other groups.

disagree about the international status hierarchy, Jonathan Mercer (2017) goes one further: he uses the Britain's decision to wage the Second Boer War to demonstrate how various groups *within the same country* can hold rival conceptions of the state's status. While Mercer suggests the variance stems from "feelings", I will argue shortly that such divergences are better understood as the result of rival *theories of international status.*

Taken together then, these works and this discussion provide the warrant for a theory that treats international status as crucial for domestic legitimation and also grants domestic groups' interpretative agency to actively produce and contest amongst themselves, and to some extent recognise their own conceptions of their status in the world. Indeed, the lack of agreed upon rules need not stop states from understanding and acting *like* they are in a status competition. Instead, the absence of a "symbolic hegemon" implies that they may make sense of their performance in terms of a hierarchy of their own construction. For instance, one frequently hears that most drivers consider themselves above average. While this factoid is usually used as an example of human hubris, it can be reconciled quite logically, if we consider that people may define "good driver" differently. Some may value the ability to avoid accidents, others may value the ability to do hand-break turn. Put simply without an agreed upon standard, it is not just possible for every driver to think they are *ab*ove average, but *to be* above average according to their own criteria. As the later chapters will seek to highlight, states can understand, act upon, and "compete" in status hierarchies of their own making too.

Studying *Theories* of Status Competition

Instead of theorizing and trying to ascertain and operationalize international status hierarchies as they really exist, I propose studying the *theorizing about status* that people, groups, and governments, undertake *and act upon.* Indeed, as Mariysia Zalewski (1996, p. 347) long ago noted, "theorists" do not have a monopoly on theori*zing*: "theorising is a way of life, a form of life, something we all do, every day, all the time": from how to make the perfect cup of tea to figuring out how to beat the traffic. Thus, "if one believes that theory is everyday practice then theorists are global actors and global actors are theorists" (Zalewski, 1996, p.348). To use an example from one of my cases (Chapter 5), in a National Security Council meeting about the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), the idea of developing a mobile land-based nuclear weapons force was ruled out by President Ford because "Everybody wants it in somebody else's backyard [....]I predict [congress] would be 10 to 1 or more against

it."[29] In short, Ford theorized and acted upon the assumption that Nimby's[30] in Congress would reject it. It did not require the theory to be tested or necessarily accurate to for it to be acted upon. Similarly, Chapter 6 analyses how the British Government legitimated going to war with the Boer by reference to what *would* happen to their status if they did not. Again, the theory was not tested, but as I will argue, it was nonetheless fundamental for legitimating the war. However, I also mean theorising in a constitutive sense: any representation of an international hierarchy in something – whether military power or quality of democracy – requires a "ontological theory" of *what is* power or *what is* democracy (Guzzini, 2013, p.534). This sort of representation of hierarchy is also a type of theorizing because it necessarily requires *selecting* what counts as power or democracy (etc.). With these understanding of theorizing in mind, I will investigate (in chapters 5, 6, and 7) how different groups within states produce rival theories of international status hierarchies, theories that legitimate their preferred strategy for how to proceed (while delegitimizing others).

Perhaps paradoxically, switching from theorizing "real" status hierarchies, to investigating people's theories about those hierarchies puts us on firmer ontological footing. Studying collective beliefs and motivations in practice requires developing proxies for collective beliefs and trying to infer what is going on within people's minds. In short, it leaves status research in the realm of metaphysics. In contrast, studying domestic theories of international status and how they legitimate particular activities involves studying observable phenomena: *discourse.*[31] Crucially, if we assume states'—or more precisely people within the state—possess discursive agency to interpret and act upon representations of their international status, then these need not have *necessary* relationship to the "collective beliefs" of other members of international society.[32] Indeed, international status–when defined as other states' collective beliefs—is not directly observable to scholars, statesman, or citizens alike. Instead, what governments act upon and *legitimate* their actions in response to, are theories that take the

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[29] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, September 17, 1975

[30] Nimby refers to people who are not necessarily against something being done but would rather it "Not [have it] In My Back Yard".

[31] Chapter 4 will elaborate the specific theoretical meaning of discourse (productive, social, political, and always somewhat "unstable"), but in short it can be defined as the pattern of representation through which humans give meaning to and make sense of their world(s) (see Campbell, 1992; Hansen, 2006; Neumann, 1996; Diez, 1999).

[32] To theorize an *international* status hierarchy as a social structure requires ascertaining what attributes are valued and by whom. Therefore, theoretical and methodological challenge to scholars becomes to theorize what attributes are commonly valued and to ascertain international society's "collective beliefs" about those attributes. Only once this procedure is undertaken, can the analyst plausibly explain a state's response to the social hierarchy.

form of *re*presentations of their status position.[33]. This opens up for studying status in the manner thick constructivists study the discursive battles over framing that make up the everyday politics of legitimation (Adler-Nissen and Gammeltoft-Hansen 2008.p.7; Krebs & Jackson, 2007 p.38). To be sure, "external" goings on in international affairs are facilitating conditions (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 38) for these framing contests, but we need not analytically privilege them a-priori. However, changing the locus of analysis of status from international collective beliefs about status to discursive theories of international status requires a quite radical ontological gestalt switch and thus some careful conceptual labour.

Narrowing Down: Theories of Status Competition

So far I have painted in broad strokes the state of status field and suggested studying how theories of international status hierarchies inform government policy. Two looming conceptual questions need to be addressed so I can narrow down and elaborate how I will problematize representations of international status hierarchies and investigate how they inform policy debates and outcomes. First of all, my object of analysis is domestic manifestations of *status competition* rather than status seeking per se. In the previous discussion I used "status seeking" to refer to any activity that involves striving to improve or maintain an actor's position in a hierarchy. This captures three types of activity of which status competition is only one:

  (1) seeking membership into a club with absolute standards
  (2) competing for position in relative hierarchy of rank (status competition)
  (3) attempting to reform either (violently or peacefully) the rules of club or rank hierarchy

This definition of status seeking while broad, rules out emotional spasms of frustration born from status denial (e.g. Volgy, 2011; 2014, cf. Renshon, 2017). Thus, seeking status is rational in the broad the sense: the means have to be plausibly connected to the goal (Onuf, 1989, p.259-263). However, it need not be rational in the sense it is normally used in IR: seeking status need not make the actor more secure or richer. Second, whether peaceful or violent, the third – usually known as revisionism and/or social creativity in prior IR status works – is *necessarily* radical because it contests the rules of the hierarchy. The other two of these

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[33] I have emphasized the "re" because as Neumann (2008) notes, no presentation of the world in language is ever immaculately conceived, it always recursively depends upon prior representation even if it is never identical

strategies are rule-governed status quo strategies: applying for club membership and competing in a rank hierarchy both reproduce the rules of the hierarchy (Ward, 2017a, p.49; Naylor, 2018, p.63). Regardless of whether they are undertaken in an affable or aggressive manner, competing for position in a ranking, reaffirms the rules: building battleships might threaten one's rival, but it reproduces the value placed upon battleships in the same way competing to on overseas aid, reproduces the hierarchy of aid-giving. Meanwhile, applying to enter the EU by meeting its democratic standards reproduces and legitimates those standards, akin to how striving to enter the nuclear club reproduces the salience of the nuclear club.

This then begs the question: How can we distinguish between seeking membership of a club and seeking to rise in a ranking? While both are rule-governed, the rules that constitute these two types of status seeking produce very different relationships between actors. As the following chapter will elaborate, a club hierarchy produces a teacher/student or gatekeeper/applicant relationship, while a ranking hierarchy produces a relationship of rivals competing in the same game. To reiterate, a mutual competition for rank is necessarily rule governed, because to construct a ranking requires some rule of comparison: what to rank and how to value it. Logically, one can *only* compete in a ranking hierarchy by first assessing relative position to one's rivals. In contrast, *in the ideal*, when entering a club defined by absolute standards (e.g. joining the nuclear club), status seekers are not engaged in a relational competition with either other applicants or existing members (See also: Towns and Rumelili, 2017). Instead, whether they manage to join depends upon their individual actions and whether they meet the absolute standard. As such, when seeking to join a status club, the actor can ignore the "performance" of its significant others.

This definition of status competition puts me in the same ball park as prior theories of status competition, but places new emphasis on the rule-governed nature of status competition and avoids conflating status competition with a substantive type of activity or one associated with a positive or negative valence. While the idea that states could theoretically compete for position in anything is normally acknowledged, prior works tend to move quickly onto defining status competition in international relations as aggressive and militaristic prior to analysis. The clearest example is also the status theory in widest use: Larson and Shevchenko's translation of SIT. Larson and Shevchenko (2010, p.73) define social competition as status seeking strategy that "aims to equal or outdo the dominant group in the area on which its claim to superior status rests. In international relations, where status is

in large part based on military and economic power" the "[i]ndicators include arms racing, rivalry over spheres of influence, military demonstrations aimed at one-upmanship, or military intervention against a smaller power". Notwithstanding that this definition collapses into one of their other types of status seeking (Ward, 2017b, p.6), by tying status competition to an concrete activity, it tacitly reifies the rules of the international hierarchy. While others ground their theory and explanation more specifically in the historical context of great power rivalry (Wohlforth, 2009; Barnhardt 2016), these works still define the substance of status competition prior to analysis. For Wohlforth (2009, p40-41) the indicators of status competition are frequency of conflict, meanwhile for Barnhard (2016, p.386) status competition is indicated by "competitive practices such as the development of advanced weaponry, competition over spheres of influence or influence within international organizations, or, as demonstrated here, the acquisition of vast amounts of territory". In short, these scholars have produced theories of status competition among great powers, *given* the existing prevailing rules of great power hierarchy.[34]

What each of these works gloss over and thus assume is that states already agree upon how to compete for status: the rules of the game. For instance, suggesting that an indicator of status competition involves arms racing, the analyst has already presumed agreement among states that more arms warrant status, and also how to evaluate the race. In other words, the outcome that is said to indicate status competition is tied to a specific understanding of the rules of the international status hierarchy (i.e. more arms = more status). While this does not stop these scholars from providing important insights, if the indicator of status competition is tied to *substantive* notion of the international hierarchy, there is no way of analysing any disagreement or changes in the rules of the game, or status competitions that do not conform to the analysts a priori assessment of the international hierarchy. The reason why prior work define status competition by reference to the substance of the hierarchy is because this allows them to develop substantive indicators of for when status competition obtains (e.g. arms racing, even when it runs against security interests). Indeed, if we do not define the substance of status competition and the rules of the game prior to analysis then it would appear extremely difficult to develop a rigorous means of identifying status competition. Therefore, the theoretical-cum-methodological dilemma my dissertation must address is:

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[34] Pouliot (2014, p.192) (again) is the exception, however his use of the term status competition suffers from the opposite problem. Pouliot treats contesting the rules of the game as status competition. Yet this seems to stretch the notion of competition too far, it would mean we have no way of distinguishing between people running in a race, and people arguing about the rules of the race.

- How can international status competitions be analysed systematically if one begins from the premise that status is inherently contestable and open to different interpretations?
- How can a framework be developed that is systematic but also sensitive to process and change in the rules of a status hierarchy?

In order to tackle these riddles, the dissertation develops a Copenhagen School-esque theoretical framework to problematize and investigate domestically produced theories of international hierarchies and their effects.[35] Indeed, similar how to Lene Hansen (2006) developed a meta-linguistic framework for investigating systematically how national identity inform foreign policy without reifying identity, or how Ole Wæver's securitization framework (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al. 1998;) identifies threats by virtue of their "grammar" rather than by their substantive referent, this dissertation strives to do the same for status competition. I will now briefly outline how I set about developing this framework and the empirical cases I used to both develop it and illustrate its usefulness.

Structure of the Dissertation: Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

To begin, Chapter 1 distils an idealized *logic* of status competition. Using the Olympic games to illustrate and model the crucial sociological aspects of an international status competition, my idealized status competition requires competitors share the same understanding of the rules of the game, have near perfect information about one another's performance and share a common understanding of what constitutes winning. Crucially, one cannot define good performance or success without ongoing reference to the relative performance of the others involved in the competition. Therefore, to compete for higher status requires formulating a strategy based upon the activities of the others in the hierarchy. My ideal type thus allows me to abstract a distinct *processual-relational logic* of status competition that avoids several pitfalls of prior works: it does not require an actor to be motivated by status, does not require an analyst to define (and thus reify) status attributes prior to analysis, and does not conflate status competition with aggressive policies.[36] Second and equally crucially, although defining

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[35] In short, the Copenhagen School developed various analytical frameworks for studying discourse and its effects in international relations (e.g. Buzan et al., 1998; Hansen 2006). See Van Munster, R. (2007) for a critical discussion.

[36] For an in depth discussion of processual-relational ontologies and their implications for research see Jackson and Nexon 1999, and chapter I & II.

status competition as "rule-governed" is broadly consistent with prior work on status competition, rules are seldom emphasized in either a definition or in analysis.[37] This enables me to problematize stage 1 and stage 3 in the status seeking process outlined above: how domestic actors interpret the status hierarchy prior to, during and after a government's status seeking activity. Finally, the ideal type also allows me to differentiate – according to their respective relational logics—status competition from other types of status seeking (e.g. striving to join a status club).

This sets the stage for chapter 2, which develops *grammar of status competition:* a meta-linguistic heuristic for identifying the *logic* of status competition as it manifests in discourse and for studying its political effects. Here, I leverage previous chapter's elaboration of processual-relational logic, to argue that three types of representation invoke and embody the logic of status competition, and simultaneously define the rules of a hierarchy: competitive comparisons and superlatives; competitive positional identity constructions;[38]and sports metaphors. When any one of these "grammatical units" is invoked, I argue that they are in that instant theorizing and instantiating a status hierarchy, defining the rules of the game and thus implying how to compete. For instance, when the UK government claimed to be a "leader of nuclear disarmament" prior to acquiring a new nuclear weapons system, it simultaneously defined the rules and invoked a competitive disarmament hierarchy within which some countries are leading and others are lagging. Although the UK's theorization of the disarmament hierarchy had little international recognition (beyond derision), it nonetheless helped legitimate its new nuclear weapon system to the anti-nuclearists among its domestic supporters (Beaumont 2015). Indeed, as I will argue and demonstrate in the coming chapters, even if the ideal of a status competition – whereby players engage in a competitive process based upon shared-rules—is seldom realized, the logic of status competition can still inform political practice as a mode of *legitimation*.

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[37] Even those that seek to use status competition to explain war, often tacitly imply common rules. For instance, Jonathon Renshon (2017) argues that "fighting for status" is rational because international society systematically rewards war-wagers with more recognition. Implicit in this model is that members of international society understand that waging war will generate recognition: fighting for status from this perspective is not a strategy to smash the hierarchy, it is a conservative strategy encouraged by very rules of the hierarchy. Indeed, rules need not be "liberal" or "good" to be rules.

[38] All identities are in some sense positional, but as chapter II elaborates, positional identities can be differentiated according to whether the position is constituted by fixed criteria or changeable, and whether the hierarchy involves a club or a rank. These different combinations produce different the relations with the other. Only one type – competitive positional identities – invokes status competition (chapter II).

Moreover, the grammar of status heuristic, can enable the analyst to identify competing theories of the international status hierarchy and how they emerge, are contested, and perhaps solidify across time, even when the words "status" or "hierarchy" are not mentioned.[39] Unlike prior works, this technique allows me to identify whether and how the rules of the hierarchy changed during the policy process. It will also enable investigating how political opponents challenge governments' theories of international status and potentially undermine their ability to legitimate competing for status. Conversely, it enables the study of how domestic opposition groups may successfully mobilize the grammar of status competition and impel the government to compete. To be clear, while I would argue that whenever the grammar of status is uttered it invokes a competitive status hierarchy and implies how to compete, whether and how such representations inform political outcomes requires empirical analysis.

Thus, if the ideal type developed in Chapter 1 tweaks the prevailing conceptions of status competition, chapter 2 draws upon "thick constructivist" research to depart quite radically from extant status works.[40] Three ontological moves are central: I replace *motivation* with *legitimation* as the locus of status-related political action, and I replace collective *beliefs* about position in social hierarchy, with *representations* of international hierarchies. Finally, language here is treated as *productive* rather than (imperfectly) reflective of reality. Taken together, this means that instead of studying how states respond to their "real" international status position via various proxies, it allows me to analyse how representations of status competition legitimize and delegitimize particular courses of action. From this perspective, like stories that constitute our national identity, whether or not they true or accurate is by the by; what matters is whether and how they inform and legitimate political practice. If previous research has given analytical priority to *international* beliefs and practices of recognition, this approach trains our gaze upon the interpretative agency that governments and citizens may possess to construct and act upon their own hierarchical orderings of the world without international recognition being determinative. Although international recognition is not determinative, this does not mean anything goes. Instead, these hierarchical orderings of the world are

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[39] This helps address the issue that among many countries it is taboo to explicitly use "status" as a rationale (Sagan, 1997).
[40] Vincent Pouliot's work (2014, 2016) is the exception here. I will explain how my work departs from his in more detail in chapter I and II. But in short, he solves the problem of knowing one's status by zooming in on diplomats, who interact on regular basis and thus can be plausibly be expected to know their status in the way that individual humans in a society normally do. States however, are not humans, and the citizens of international society do not interact in the same way with foreign citizens, and thus they cannot be expected to get a sense of the game (habitus) in the manner that diplomats do.

structured by pre-existing discursive resources available in the policy context within which a government operates (Chapter II; see Diez, 1999; Hansen, 2006).

While this move requires some conceptual heavy lifting, it is perhaps useful shorthand to understand it as an attempt to do for status research what securitization theory did for security studies (Buzan et al, 1998). Akin to how securitization scholars investigate the discursive processes by which threats become constituted as threats and how successful securitization can legitimate particular responses to those threats (while remaining ambivalent about their objective "threatiness"), this dissertation theorizes how activities or attributes become framed as status competitions and legitimate competitive actions, quite independent of whether that framing refers to "real" *international* status. Meanwhile, just as securitization processes do not require any actor to be motivated by status for their effects to obtain, the grammar of status competition can be mobilized and its effects investigated, without attempting to infer whether an actor was really motivated by status. What matters instead, is whether a) the grammar of status competition was indeed mobilized by an actor and b) whether the representations of international status competition had the *effects* of legitimating policies that would otherwise not have transpired in the manner they did.

Chapter 3 reflects upon my selection of cases, sources, and the limitations of my approach, and in general tries to persuade the reader of the rigour of my procedures. At this point it is especially pertinent to mention the justification for my seemingly eclectic choice of cases – the a how theories of international status informed 1) the legitimation of the Boer war between 1899-1902, 2) the legitimation of Norwegian education reforms at the turn of the 21st century, and 3) the backstage legitimation of the US's negotiating position in the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties (SALT I & II) from 1969 to 1980. These cases are selected precisely because they are so different in order to illustrates the "transferability" of my framework (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Schwartz-Shea 2015, p.142). In other words, I aim to show how my "grammar of status" framework can provide novel insights into very different policies, states and historical contexts. Each case also highlights how the framework can operate across levels of analysis. To be clear, the purpose of my framework is not to produce generalizable findings but to develop a status framework that can provide *useful* insights into a broad range of cases.[41] This type of "can" theorizing – theorizing the possible

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[41] This should not be mistaken for most different system design, which is a positivist strategy striving to show the key factor that produced the same outcome in very different cases.

enables me to highlight *potential* systematic blind-spots in prior status research, which I will reflect upon in the conclusion.

Chapter 4-6 – The Empirical Pay off

All this theorising ain't worth a dime if it cannot provide useful insights into world politics. Therefore, each empirical chapter utilizes my framework to address significant puzzles in IR. Each chapter follows a systematic procedure: guided by the grammar of status, they all involve a longitudinal analysis of domestic discourse and pay special attention to whether and how representations/theories international status were used to legitimate (or not) the policies in question.[42] In particular, the grammar of status allowed me to detect how these theories often changed through the different stages of the policy-making *process*, often in ways crucial for understanding the size, shape and timing of the policy outcomes. At this point it is worth emphasizing my humble goals. I am not setting out to pose status as a rival, all or nothing explanation. Status - by definition - can never be the sole explanation for anything: all status-granting activities possession, must have a "primary utility" as well as symbolic (Gilady, 2018). For instance, even a Ferrari gets a person from A to B. The decision to buy *a* car may have little to do with status, but the decision to buy a *red*, *super* car, does. Similarly, most government activities – like education, healthcare or security policy—are broadly driven by conventional concerns for maximising public utility in those fields. However, exactly when, why and how particular policies came to take the form they did, may depend upon reference to, and legitimation via, representations of international hierarchies.[43]

Chapter 5 addresses directly Mercer's puzzle of why states would wage war for international status when international recognition is seldom forthcoming (Mercer, 2017). Tracing the British discourse across three episodes prior and during the war, the chapter shows how government first theorized the war as necessary to *preserve* Britain's status as a great power and avoid humiliation at the hands of tiny foe. However, with the help of the press, over the course of the war, and despite Britain's struggles, the government and pro-war press re-theorized the rules competition and worthiness of their enemy, such that it became possible

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[42] See chapter III for methodology, method, and discussion of primary sources
[43] As I argue in chapter V, the growth of international rankings makes this technologically possible in more activities than previously, while the *social will* to make international comparisons has also emerged concurrently. For a longer discussion of the social and technological conditions for making "global comparisons" see Beaumont, (2017a).

to present the war to the domestic audience as a boon to Britain's status. Even when, as Mercer demonstrates, international audiences were unimpressed. Indeed, when the domestic audience and the landslide election that followed the war is taken account, I argue Mercer's puzzle dissolves. From the governments perspective, despite the huge economic cost and lack of international recognition, the Boer war helped legitimate the government and secure a second term in office. Moreover, by paying heed to the discursive context, my approach illuminates how the domestic representations of the value of the war in terms of international status were bound up with racialized and gendered discourses in circulation at the time. As such, the case highlights how my grammar of status framework can help address status research's gender and racial blind spots (Beaumont & Røren, 2018, p.19).

Chapter 6 tackles the question of how international organizations can exert influence even when lacking legal authority and any carrots or sticks. Using Norway's response to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranking as a case, the chapter argues that international rankings operate as "narrative Esperanto" that allow "foreign" theories of status hierarchies to bypass the obstacles that I argue usually hinder inter-subjective agreement about the rules of international hierarchies. In this way, rankings provide discursive resources to domestic actors that can enable them to use the "grammar of status" to legitimize particular policy reforms that would otherwise face more domestic opposition. Indeed, the chapter suggests that the raft of education reforms Norway carried out in the 2000s would be unlikely to have taken place at the time they did, in the form they did, without PISA's construction and circulation of an international education hierarchy. However, tracing 19 years of the education policy discourse highlights a more critical "reactivity", hitherto overlooked by prior international rankings and status research. The process of competing in the PISA rankings led to a growing number of domestic groups to question the rules of the game and develop rival theories of educational status that have now spread to mainstream politics. This emergent resistance to the competition, I argue, has undermined the potential for PISA to legitimate future policy reforms and highlights the theoretical importance – for critical rankings researchers – of treating an international ranking's influence as a discursively a mediated process that is always susceptible to resistance and contestation from below.

Finally, Chapter 7 seeks to sheds light on why the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) proved so difficult and underwhelming. As such. this chapter speaks to what remains the most significant and long-standing puzzle in (traditional) security studies (Kroenig, 2018): why did

the "superpowers" continue to arms race even when a second strike capability was assured? To make this puzzle tractable, the chapter zooms in SALT I & II, which took place between 1970 and 1979. For several pro-nuclear realists, nuclear arms control should have been straightforward, given the declining utility of each extra weapon (e.g. Glaser, 1994; Waltz, 1981). By tracing the official top level security discourse via recently declassified archives, the chapter shows the negotiating positions the US took were primarily legitimated in reference to domestic and international status, rather than what was deemed necessary to deter the Soviets. Moreover, the specific theory for evaluating the status value of the US's negotiation position(s) was contested through the process of SALT I, and only solidified several years into SALT II. Indeed, I argue that the eventual theory of status that was settled upon was a downstream consequence of the domestic debate that followed SALT I. In this way, domestic rules defining international status solidified and crystalized during the process of SALT II, structuring the US's negotiating position, slowing down negotiations and limiting the ability of the US to pursue other strategic objectives. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the difficulty of Cold War nuclear arms control is better understood as result of a (domestically produced) international status competition rather than a security dilemma. The chapter also allows me to mount a defence of the general hitherto belittled for preparing to fight the last war.

To conclude, I elaborate how studying the effects of *theories of* international status instead of international status opens up a new research agenda that significantly expands the range of policies and practices that an international status lens can be used to account for. For instance, one blind spot I identify here is the *rationalist baseline bias* in IR status research :[44] In short, if one deduces status' effects by showing the outcome to be irrational by other theories, we overlook how status can also be crucial for legitimating seemingly rational policies. Another avenue this approach enables, as my cases illustrate, is to provide a means to illuminate how domestic groups can resist and undermine a state's attempts to compete for international status. I will also draw together my findings and their theoretical implications to argue that contra conventional wisdom, ambiguity around social status is a social good that governments and citizens would be wise to cherish and protect.

Chapter I

The Logic of Status Competition

Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do,
to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else,
you must run at least twice as fast as that!

The Red Queen

In Lewis Carrol's *Through the Looking Glass.* 1871

Introduction

Every four years between 776 BC[45] and 200 BC, citizens representing Greek city states would converge upon Olympia in the Greek City state of Elis to compete in the Panhellenic Games.[46] It was not uncommon for city states be at war with one another during the events. However, their military differences seldom[47] stopped them from sending their best men (it was always men) to compete in rule-governed tests of strength, courage, and above all masculinity. The games evolved over time, but their mainstay involved the stadion (600m sprint), wresting, boxing, chariot racing, and horse racing. The events embodied the primary skills prized in Greek city states: skills needed for hunting and warfare. Indeed, the games were an opportunity for cities to display the "excellence" of their citizens, fostering civic pride, not to mention offering a useful distraction from any social-economic unrest amongst their citizenship. The city states were not ignorant of the political benefits, sponsoring gymnasiums and rewarding Olympic champions handsomely. Similar to the Olympics today, the competitors could expect to be cheered on by thousands of partisan supporters in attendance, and welcomed home as heroes should they return victorious. Indeed, the tendency for citizens to live vicariously via the successes of other members of their group is certainly not only a modern phenomenon.

Both laymen and scholars will be immediately familiar with and capable of recognising the Olympic Games as an instance of international status competition. To be sure, prior status works might not consider the Olympics an especially important status competition for states, but they would accept that it could be conceptualized and analysed as one.[48] What is theoretically interesting about the Olympics vis a vis other international activities treated as status competitions (e.g. arms racing), is not its political significance but the high degree of institutionalisation. Indeed, unlike other international status competitions, the Olympics is *designed* to be a status competition among states. We can therefore reasonably expect that the theoretically important aspects of status competition are visible and amenable to abstraction and illustration. Indeed, this chapter will begin with a critical discussion of prior status research in order to develop an ideal typical definition of status competition before illustrating

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[45] Though the precise date is disputed amongst historians (Faulkner, 2012)

[46] This chapter contains elements and ideas that I presented at conferences (Beaumont, 2017a; 2017b).

[47] Sparta were once banned from the games and subsequently fought a war to gain re-admittance, however they were not banned from the games *because* of an ongoing war Faulkner (2012)

[48] Indeed, some IR scholars have empirically investigated state-status seeking via the Olympics (Rhamey and Early, 2013).

its observable implications using the Olympics. The definition I derive from this procedure runs as follow: status competition is *a processual-relational, rule governed competition for position whereby the relative performance of competitors is easily identifiable by virtue of the shared understanding of the rules of the game.* While broadly consistent with extant status research, the advantage of my ideal type is that it gives new but due emphasis to the *rule governed* nature of status competition and the specific processual-relational logic of action it produces (see below).[49] This is crucial for the chapters that follow because it is this distinct logic that makes empirical manifestations of status competition identifiable and recognisable amidst messy political reality, even when the ideal is not reached.

Although I will address this in the method chapter, it is useful to clarify that because ideal types are deliberately accentuations of reality, it is nonsensical to "test" them against that empirical reality (Jackson, 2010, p.166) Instead, the ideal type disciplines the researcher by calling attention to particular aspects of concrete phenomena (while deliberately backgrounding others) that can be more or less *useful* to helping a researcher apprehend happenings in a given case (Ibid). By their very nature ideal types are never found in their pure form, it is up to the researcher to adduce additional factors – hopefully theoretically interesting ones— that interplay (or not) with model dynamic in order to construct plausible case specific narrative that adequately explains events (Jackson, 2010, 170). In the empirical inquiries (chapters IV-VI) that follow, the fact that the states in question do not compete pure rule-governed competitions for position in which no other logics or operate, or where there is no disagreement over the rules, is not a problem for my analysis but a deliberate consequence of my research design. Indeed, it is precisely the disagreement over the rules of the competition and the consequences of this disagreement that I wish to investigate.

Given extant works have already conceptualized status competition, one might also reasonably complain: why do we need a new definition? Do I not risk muddying an already crowded conceptual field?[50] Yet, it is precisely because status competition is often used in

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[49] All the works cited make reference to status being positional and/or based upon rank in valued attributes. Thus, even if they do not state it explicitly, they necessarily imply rules (broadly understood as principles of comparison, not necessarily backed with authority).

[50] Two other concepts bear close resemblance to status that are worth a footnote: prestige and standing. Indeed, prestige is often explicitly treated as an analytical synonym, or at least near enough. I am inclined to agree that when hierarchies of prestige are defined as inherently positional, social, and not tied to any particular quality (e.g Mercer, 2017;). However, there is a narrower analytical use that retains popularity among realist orientated status scholars: Gilpin's (1983) definition of prestige as "reputation for power". This is obviously unhelpful for me because as we saw a) reputation is not relative and positional in the same sense as status in a status competition, and b) that my definition means one can have status in any social activity, including those

inconsistent ways that I need to be precise here. Further, as I argued in the introduction, the ways that status competition is usually defined and operationalised downplay the rule-governed nature of status competition, while at the same time defining it in relation to concrete behaviours and motivations that I argue have no *necessary* relationship to status competition. This procedure leads to the double consequence of at once reifying the rules of international hierarchies and simultaneously ruling out the possibility of analysing any status competition that does not conform to the analysts a-prior assessment of the international hierarchy. By foregrounding the processual-relational implications of status competition rather than the substance of the competition or the motivation, my approach enables me to develop an analytical framework in chapter 2 that can identify empirical manifestations of status competition without defining the hierarchy a-priori or needing to disentangle status from other motivations.

To get there, this chapter undertakes three interrelated tasks in turn. First, I begin by clarifying why the dominant—and seemingly similar SIT typology of status seeking (Larson and Shevchenko, 2003; 2010; 2019) - cannot just be repurposed for my analysis. Section two then sets about defining status dynamics sociologically; that is, from the social structures that give rise to different types of status seeking. I then elaborate the specific processual-relational logic embodied by status competition and the relationship between players it produces. The third section parses from prior works three analytically distinct mechanisms that can push an actor to engage in a status competition: *prizes*, *pride* and *pleasing the group*. I show how the first and the last push a state to compete for status, yet do not require status to be the motivation. I contend that these mechanisms taken together provide sufficient grounds to use the ideal of status competition as a baseline for analysis from which reality departs, rather than using conventional security or economic models as the default.

What Prior Concepts of Status Competition Miss: Rules and Process

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unconnected to "power" in Gilpin's realpolitik sense. The difference between standing and status is even more fine grained and almost boils down to semantic ease: standing is always positional like status, refers to a social hierarchy like status, and indeed almost always implies a status. However, status implies a particular identity that goes with the standing in some activity. One can *be* a social status – e.g. great power – one can only have a high standing. This is also true for status versus prestige: if one has a prestigious position, that position *is* normally a social status. Ultimately, the analytical differences between standing, status and prestige would not make a great deal of difference to the analysis except that it would likely prove harder to read and less intuitive. Thus, to be clear, while I hold that it is crucial that reputation and status not be conflated analytically, my positive selection of status over prestige and standing, has more to do pragmatic reasons and its aesthetic preference.

Before I develop my typology of status dynamics, this section elaborates the value it adds to prior conceptions of status competition already in circulation. This is important for two reasons. First, status competition has a general, fuzzy meaning in both layman's language and in academia. Sometimes status competition is used to refer to *any* activity aimed at improving an actor's social position: whether acquiring particular status symbols, striving to enter a club, besting a rival, or contesting the rules of a hierarchy. Without a clear definition, it would produce confusion and render analysis impossible because every activity could be construed to be a status competition. However, the second reason requires further justification. Status research in IR already has an existing typology based upon SIT (Larson and Shevchenko 2003; 2010; 2014; 2019) – in widespread use[51] - that specifies different ideal types of status-seeking strategies, including one called "social competition". Moreover, Larson and Shevchenko's concept of social competition may at first blush seem strikingly similar to mine and without clarification, there is a risk a reader may consider my rendering of status competition redundant.

Larson and Shevchenko (2003; 2010; 2014; 2019) provides an intuitive typology for identifying international status-seeking strategies. Drawing from social psychology, the basic assumption of the theory is that individuals desire for positive inter-group comparisons manifests itself in status seeking activities at the state level. To theorize how this internal impulse is manifested in international politics, Larson and Shevchenko ostensibly directly transpose Tajfel and Turner's typology of status seeking strategies:

> "(t)he lower-status group may seek to imitate the higher-status group (social mobility), defeat the other group (social competition), or find new value dimensions in which it is superior (social creativity). Similarly, states may emulate more advanced states, compete to outdo the dominant state, or identify alternative values." Larson and Schevchenko (2014, p.38)

They then go on to theorize environmental factors that would lead to one or another strategy: legitimacy, stability and the permeability of the status hierarchy.

As intuitive as this sounds, this IR translation of social psychology suffers considerable analytical shortcomings (Beaumont, 2017b; Ward, 2017). I have already noted that by turning individual mobility into a group strategy, Larson and Shevchenko's rendering of SIT occludes a crucial rational for status seeking: pleasing the in-group lest they decide to dis-identify or leave (see introduction). However, this move also has a second conceptual cost. By turning

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[51] As Ward (2017, p. 2) notes "No other [IR status] framework has as much influence"

mobility into a collective strategy, Larson and Schevchenko's blur the conceptual distinction between mobility and competition (Beaumont 2017; Ward, 2017). The problems this causes become clear in their use of examples to illustrate their types. They use NATO and the EU expansion as examples of social mobility by new members, and the Imperial Britain and Wilhelm Germany's arms racing and war as their example of social competition. However, by seeking a "place in the sun" and trying to surpass Britain's navy, it seems clear that Germany was "emulating the values and behaviours" of its rival as well as seeking to outdo them. As Ward (2017, p.6) notes, "All that remains to separate the two [types] is the arbitrary distinction between the pursuit of status markers that are militarily or economically significant and those that are not." Thus, within Larson and Shevchenko's typology emulation and competition collapse into one another meanwhile their concept of social competition makes an a-priori commitment to the substance of the competition prior to analysis.

In addition, Larson and Shevchenko's status seeking strategies are explicitly tied to status as a motivation. This is not a problem for their research design: investigating activities in world politics that seem better accounted for by status motivation than security or economic motivations. However, tying status competition to a distinct motivation also occludes fruitful inquiries into *how* states seek to "outdo" one another in international status hierarchies for reasons not *necessarily* related to status motivations. Indeed, I contend that there is value in investigating status competition as a sociological phenomenon defined by its social characteristics, rather than the inner-psychological motivations that may *sometimes* give rise to it. Unmooring status competition from any one motivation thus provides a means of escaping the infamously difficult task of trying to discern motivations (Wittgenstein, 1958). However, it also sets a challenge: how to produce insights about status competition without juxtaposing my explanation with conventional explanations based upon security and wealth.

To undertake this task, the following section to foreground and flesh out what Larson and Shevchenko and other social-psychology inspired- scholars have hitherto left tacit in their frameworks: Before one can plausibly "outdo" a rival, one must first understand what to outdo the rival in, and what would count as having outdone that rival. In short: status competitions require rules; otherwise status-seeking would be akin to playing the lottery. Steven Ward has called for further theoretical work along precisely these lines, noting that (2017, p. 4) "Status markers are social constructs, and explaining their origins and evolution—why, for instance, empire was once valued as a marker of high standing but is no longer—requires going beyond the world of social psychology." In other words, Ward calls for further research into changes

in the rules structuring states-status seeking. To be sure, prior status research – Larson and Shevchenko included - are not oblivious to the rule-governed nature of status competition, but it is tacit rather than explicit. Arguably, one result of this thin theorization of rules of status competition is that it leaves scholars defining the indicators of status competition in terms of the very rules the game they are analysing. This, as I noted in the introduction, precludes investigating changes or contestation of the rules.

The following section picks up on Ward's cue to foreground these processes of social construction that SIT-based scholarship brackets. In particular, I take inspiration from sociology -inspired scholarship to foreground the role that rules play in defining status hierarchies and the type status dynamic different rules produce (Onuf, 1989; Towns, 2010, Towns and Rumelili, 2017; Naylor, 2018). This enables me to distinguish status competition from other status dynamics and crucially, abstract a distinct processual-relational logic of status competition that I argue can be discerned without reference to motivations and or defining the substance of the hierarchy prior to analysis. Ultimately, by foregrounding rules in my ideal type of status competition, I lay the groundwork for problematizing those rules in the analysis (chapters IV, V, VI, VI).

Developing an Ideal Type of Status Competition

This section sets out to conceptually distinguish between status dynamics by virtue of the rules of the status hierarchies that give rise to them. We should begin with a meat and potato definition of *status*. At its simplest, status is a position in a social hierarchy that based upon a quality, attribute, or activity. For one person or group to have high status requires that another have low status,[52]and there is an audience to recognise these positions: whether it be other members of the hierarchy or a third party. To be clear, status always implies hierarchy of actually existing positions of superiority and inferiority. This sets status apart from reputation and identity. Everybody in a village can conceivably have a reputation as a reliable debtor and the identity of an "upstanding citizen". These could rely upon the discursive imagination of what would generate a bad reputation citizen in poor standing. For instance, the EU's self relies partly on another from its past (Diez, 2004) meanwhile every state could have the identity of democracy with its meaning generated in reference to history (Hansen,

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[52] At this point there is no need to distinguish between individual status and group status.

2006).[53] However, once one starts ranking reputation as better or worse, or ordering identity into positions then one has a status hierarchy.

Status hierarchies require shared "rules" that defines the criteria by which status positions are attributed (see also: Towns, 2010; Towns and Rumelili, 2017)). For instance, the status hierarchy of the 100 sprint is determined by the simple rule that the winner is she who can run the fastest over 100m, starting from when the starting gun goes off. It is not, for instance, decided by who reaches the fastest speed during the course of the race. Similarly, during the early 20th century, possessing battleships became a relatively accepted measure of "world power", while having the most battleships granted their possessor the status of leading world power (Murray, 2010, p.665). It is important to note that such status hierarchies do not *require* authority in the legal/rational sense to become meaningful: to be sure, authority can help organise a status hierarchy but it is not necessary for status hierarchies to emerge. This sort of informal "broad" hierarchy – patterns of inequality in material or symbolic resources— can cut against and across "narrow" hierarchical relations of formal authority (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016, p.630). For instance, in the school yard status hierarchies develop that run counter to the wishes of the school authorities: seldom do the hardest-working or academically successful get the highest social status.[54] They are *rule-governed* in the sense that to define better or worse, high or low, position requires a principle of comparison (Onuf, 1989, p.267), it need not require force to back it up. In this sense, status hierarchies are perfectly compatible with anarchy understood as the absence of formal authority (Mcconaughey, Musgrave, & Nexon, 2018, p.186-187).

At this point, a reader might reasonably suggest that I am in danger of defining all social life as implicated in status hierarchies, thus rendering the concept less than helpful. We can escape banality (the observation that societies are always hierarchical) in at least three ways. First, one can investigate variance in individuals' or groups' concern for status (e.g. Renshon 2016, 2017). One can historicize status hierarchies: asking how particular hierarchies, emerged, changed, and dwindled across time (e.g. Towns, 2010; Towns, 2012; chapters IV-VI). However, here, I will focus on differentiating between *types* of status hierarchies and the type of *relations* and *processes* that they engender. This is necessary because, as Ayşe Zarakol

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[53] In practice, it is almost certain that a good reputation and an upstanding citizen would be defined in such a way that real and existing members of the community did not meet the criteria. However, here we would quickly get into some kind of status hierarchy.

[54] At least not at my high school.

(2017, p.12) points out, the extant status research tends to focus on investigating states' responses to their position in pre-existing hierarchies, and suggests "[w]hat is lacking from this body of work is a more direct engagement with the concept of hierarchy itself." My typology will draw on extant work and remain in the same etymological ball park as prior IR status-research, but draw out essential features hitherto downplayed or undertheorized: status competition's rule-governed nature and the specific processual-relational dynamic status competitions embody. In the process, I develop a sociological ideal type of status *competition* and logically differentiate it from other types of status seeking.

Fixed and Changeable Diacratica

The first slice towards defining status competition, is to divide status hierarchies along whether the criteria upon which it is based is changeable or fixed. It is not difficult to find instances of fixed status hierarchies in history and indeed the present day. The Indian Caste system is paradigmatic of a status hierarchy that is based upon fixed criteria, "ascribed" by the rules of society (Linton, 1936). For instance, within some cultures, age defines one's place in a society and as such while one gradually does move up the hierarchy it is independent of the individuals will. Crucially for our purposes, there is no meaningful way in which status *competition* – rule guided efforts to move up a social hierarchy – can obtain in such social arrangement. To be sure, members can contest the hierarchy and strive to overturn it, but they cannot *compete* for status position. In international society, the neo-Darwinian racist hierarchies that underlay slavery and imperialism come closest to the ideal of fixed-ascribed status hierarchies.

Conversely, the EU's membership criteria, or the OECD's PISA education rankings come close to constituting the ideal of achieved status hierarchies. Here status is attributed by what an individual or group do or acquire, rather than what characteristics they are born with. While it is not my goal here, I would suggest this could ultimately facilitate analysis of change *between* social hierarchies or hybrid hierarchies that combine both fixed and changeable criteria. Indeed, often actually existing hierarchies contain a mix of both: the EU requires prospective members to be "European"[55] *and* to meet certain fixed criteria for admittance (democratic and economic norms). Meanwhile the great power club once only admitted western states (fixed) which had *achieved* relatively high levels of material power.

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[55] Though the extent to which this is fixed must come with an asterix: See Neumann (2003) and Rumelili (2004) on the politics and malleability of what is or is not "Europe".

While status-seeking research in IR implicitly focuses on *achieved* status hierarchies, making this distinction allows us to bring together previously fragmented research, and capture under one framework different types status hierarchy. Most importantly for my purposes is that it allows us to see that striving to improve position in fixed hierarchy is logically impossible without contesting the rules: following the rules can only lead to one type of status dynamic: perpetual domination. In other words, the relations of super-and subordination will remain for as long as the rules of the game are not challenged.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Status Clubs & Rankings*</p>

The next distinction is between status clubs and status ranking. To draw as sharp a conceptual line between these two types as possible, I will distil them to their simplest and most extreme form. At its simplest, to enter a status club requires an entrant to meet an absolute standard and creates a simple hierarchy of in-group and outgroup: those that can meet the standard and those that do not (traditional/modern; nuclear/non-nuclear; democratic/autocratic). Esteem from membership of clubs is generated by difficulty, scarcity and exclusivity (Gilady, 2018; Paikowsky, 2017): as more join the group, membership will become less exclusive and thus number of rivals to whom members can seem superior too dwindles (Paul et al. 2014, call this "dilution"). Related, but distinct, *ranking* hierarchies turn these standards into continuum in which everyone's performance generates a position that is relative to others. No longer is one democratic or not, they can have better or worse democracy and even have the best democracy. Thus, because only one can rank top, relative rankings automatically guarantee and generate scarcity, exclusivity and facilitate and encourage relative competition: because one cannot improve position without at least one rival moving down (see Towns and Rumeili 2017 for a related discussion).

<p style="text-align:center;">*Joining a Club*</p>

The usual way to leverage this difference is to note how status groups operate like "club goods", which mitigate the zero-sum competition for status position in a ranking (e.g. Paul, et al 2014). Though each new member reduces the exclusivity of the group, new members do not push out the old members, so long as they continue to meet the absolute standard. Thus, existing members may try to block new members (e.g. the nuclear club) but they are not directly competing for position with aspiring members (though they may do once they have

joined the group). Indeed, what is lost in this discussion is that seeking to gain access to a status club with absolute standards does not only mitigate competition, the dynamic it produces does not constitute a relational-competition between in-group and outgroup *at all*. To be sure there is a hierarchical relationship between aspiring-members and members. If the club is desirable it may imply the members wield power (symbolic or material) over aspiring members. However, because absolute standard standards are independent from a rival's performance, the relationship between members/non-members is one of *gate-keeper/applicant* or perhaps *teacher/student*. Thus, when club hierarchies have absolute standards as rule of entry, it does *not* make members and non-members *rivals*, like those competing for position in ranking-hierarchy. Moreover, such a hierarchy does not imply a potentially endless *process* of competition: once one has met an absolute standard or entered a club they can theoretically cease their status seeking.

Some caveats and clarifications are in order here. It is crucial distinguish between the everyday understandings of status clubs and a conceptually useful definition that can be distinguished from rankings. Lots of actually existing status groups are derived from *rank* in a given a metric. For instance, the realist description of the great power status (club) is one based upon relative power position, aspiring members and members are in direct competition with one another for position. Indeed, when club membership is based upon ranking in an achieved hierarchy and the club membership is permeable, then *ceterus paribus* it will produce the same dynamic as a status hierarchy based upon rank. As such, a club based on rank, the *dynamic process* that unfolds between members and applicants is analytically identical to those that unfold between states fighting for position in a ranking.[56] Thus, it would be a redundant or at least confusing to use this everyday understanding of clubs.

<center>*Status Competitions*</center>

Drawing this all together and excluding fixed hierarchies and club hierarchies, we arrive at the type of hierarchy that engenders and makes possible *status competition*. Following our discussion of fixed/achieved hierarchies and rankings/clubs, a status competition requires the

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[56] Where the line is drawn in practice, and whether status clubs are institutionalized, is not irrelevant. By virtue of defining the terms of entry, they can standardize the competition, while their exclusive meetings may engender feelings of inclusion and pride in their members, and feelings of exclusion and jealousy in outsiders. However, these social privileges/punishments associated with status competitions and clubs will be addressed in the next section. As such, they can affect the intensity of competition but not the positional dynamic itself

hierarchy's criteria to involve attributes that can be changed via the agency of the members of the hierarchy. In order for it to be a competition rather than club, there must be different *relative* positions within the hierarchy: one can move up only if another moves down (in its ideal form). The visual abstraction of a status competition is the construction of an ordinal ranking whereby competitors are ordered according to their relative performance in a given metric (Onuf, 1989, p.267). Crucially, unlike applicant/gatekeeper or relations of domination, members of the hierarchy have the *relationship of rivals*: they cannot know their status without reference to the relative performance of the others involved in the competition. Moreover, in the ideal, all the players involved understand and accept the rules and have perfect information about the game. Thus there is no ambiguity about who has the status of winner or leader: nor who ambiguity over who suffers the ignominy of defeat. With status competition distinguished from other types of status dynamic, we are now ready to turn to the specific relational process that status competition embodies.

Figure 1.

Typology of Status Hierarchies & Status Relations

	Inherent Status	**Achieved Status**
Status Club	Status Domination	Status Application
Ranking Hierarchy		Status Competition

The Processual-Relational Implications of Status Competition

Understood in this manner, status competitions engender a peculiar dynamic process that is recognizably different from other types of goal orientated action. Status competitions are relational for everyone (because every move up or down a ranking can have ripple effects), but is distinct from the individual wishes of the participants. Critically, when there is more than one other, if an actor takes on losses in order to make the rival have even less (like in a zero sum game), then they risk moving down the rankings (even if they best that specific rival). Indeed, sprinters in a race do not rugby tackle their opponents; it would be self-defeating. Similarly, the superpowers did not use their nuclear weapons to "win" the arms race. Even if they might have had the last nuclear weapon standing, they would have blown each other to the bottom of the global rankings. Instead, rivals engaged in status competition

strive for more of the object of value they are competing to have the most of, or do better at the activity they seek to do best at. Crucially, because performance is always relative to others, there is no necessary limit on the process of competition. Such a *process* in the extreme may end up resembling Lewis Carrol's Queen's Race, in which "it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place". This stands in stark contrast to absolute standards defining status clubs, where one need not pay attention to one's rivals to meet the standard (see: Towns and Rumelili, 2017). Moreover, while concern for relative status is always relational, competitors are not related in the same way. When an actor placed-low in the rankings moves up to the middle of rankings it affects all the others below, who will experience a ripple effect upon their position. However, those placed above it will not feel the ripple. All this implies that actors engaged in status competition will pay closer attention to the performance of those near them in the rankings. (see also Frank, 1985, Renshon, 2017; Røren, 2019).

The Olympics illustrates how status competitions generate a specific processual-relational dynamic amongst the "players". A sailing competition is particularly apt for putting into focus the rule-governed, processual-relational dynamic I wish to illuminate. A competitor in an Olympic sailing race has a position in the ranking, but she also has a socially significant status that changes as the competition proceeds. While the participants begin equal, the process of racing soon generates a socially consequential status hierarchy. The first placed participant gets recognized as having the status of 'winner' of the first race and the status of the 'leader' going into the next. Meanwhile, the second placed contestant becomes 'the challenger', and depending on the scoring system the rest of the competitors might be identified as 'laggards'. The rules of the competition stipulate that players accumulate points that carry over into the next race. These points define position and statuses that emerge and change as the races proceed. Usually, by the latter races, the behaviour of the sailors seems odd because the leader in the final round ceases trying to win the race itself, but sacrifices winning that round to block off the challenger. In short, the mutual awareness of their respective positions as the game proceeds changes the status of the participants, which in turn informs their behavior to one another. This is contra the usual rationalist conceptualization of interaction whereby 'players' compete in "context free games" in which they "enter with preferences formed and leave with identities unchanged." (McCourt, 2014, p.42) Within sailing competitions the processual-relational dynamic is especially apparent, however other Olympic events – which all share our generic conception of status competitions – also embody it.

Indeed, very different Olympic events share this processual-relational logic even if the precise form it takes differs. For instance, long distance road cycling races tend to follow a pattern whereby a large number of competitors deliberately flock together to enjoy the benefits of sitting in the slip-stream of the others, thereby saving energy. They quite deliberately cooperate by taking turns to lead the peloton to equalise the advantages to all. However, while this cooperation carries on throughout, it is still a competition. Throughout the race, competitors will seek to break away from the group, which will usually prompt the peloton to up the pace, and attempt to run down the leaders. Of particular interest to us here, is that the speed at which the peloton moves is relational consequence – or ripple effect – of the timing of particular competitor's decision to try to break away. This cannot be known a-prior by any one rider themselves, nor by assessing their physical qualities. Elsewhere, the 100m sprint arguably has the least pronounced processual-relational dynamic, but nonetheless, even here we find that upon realising they are winning the race, a sprinter may ease up towards the finish, and may well raise their hands in the air in celebration before crossing the line. Although events might ostensibly involve the same activity— for instance, running— the different rules – running 100m rather than 10,000— imply different strategies, a different skillset and thus favour different types of competitors.

These very different events nonetheless share a processual-relational logic that can shapes the behaviour and strategies of participants. It is not the activity itself – e.g. running or sailing— that tells one how to compete: it is the specifics of the rules defining the competition that enables processual-relational competition to unfold among participants. Crucially, if the competitors in any of these events did not share a common understanding of those rules, then a relational logic may well inform the players actions, but it would be impossible to agree upon who led and who lagged, meanwhile disagreement about who won and who lost would be endemic. Ultimately, these examples illustrate the importance of rules to status competition and thus why – unlike prior research - I place such emphasis on them in my definition of status competition as *a rule governed competition for position whereby relative performance is easily identifiable by virtue of the shared understanding of the rules.*

Back to International Relations

In the context of government policy making, we can recognise the processual-relational logic of status competition when relative position in an international hierarchy affects the size,

form, and timing of particular policies a state pursues.[57] While international politics is messier than the Olympics, this processual-relational logic of status competition is often visible. For instance, as Nicholas Onuf has pointed out in *World of Our Making*, the Cold War "superpower" competition resembled such a dynamic, whereby their status competition produced a "climate of contest and spectacle-an unending tournament, rounds of play in many arenas, all of us a captive audience." What makes this processual rather than just embodying the "logic of positionality" (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016, p.637), is that a policy that competed for status in a given ranking would need to be *continuously* informed by consideration of how that policy would improve or downgrade their position in the ranking. Indeed, when treated as a process that unfolds rather than a one off strategy prompted by position, we can see how status competitions engender change as a series of "reverberations along a web of interdependencies" (Jackson & Nexon, 1999, p. 299). Defining international status competition as a dynamic process – rather than a discrete outcome – thus opens up for analysis of how changes in relative position *or* changes in the rules affect the behaviours of players/states.

As I illustrated with the Olympics events, the *processual-relational logic* of status competitions is not limited to any specific referent: it can theoretically emerge in any public activity, whether consumption patterns or norm adherence. It makes no odds whether a state is competing in "material" hierarchies (e.g. tanks, GDP, battleship tonnage) or moral competition over quality of human rights record (see Matter and Zarakol, 2016, p.638). If one wishes to establish oneself as the greatest of "great powers", then it may well imply investing in more battleships or air craft carriers than a rival, even if the military's analysis suggested submarines offer better bang for the buck (see Gilady, 2018, p.59-60). Similarly, if accepting a large number of refugees became the barometer of status as a "good power", then a state would need to know how many refugees their rivals took to know how to compete. Here, it is not reference to the law, or economic cost-benefit analysis that shapes the specific size and shape of the policy, but comparison to specific peers' policies/performances. Indeed, while liberal-inflected norms scholarship (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) and tends to assume an individualist relationship to the norm determines appropriate behaviour (one either follows it or not – see Sending, 2002), international society's expanding array of governance ranking practices (Broome et al., 2018), highlights how norms can be performed well or badly

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[57] Although my empirical focus is on international status competition among states, this logic can theoretically inform any activity undertaken by individuals or groups that can conceive of themselves in a rank-ordered hierarchy.

and actors can be ranked accordingly (Towns and Rumelili, 2017).[58] However, as noted above, these activities and attributes do not come ready ranked and valued. Just as whether a running race is 100m or 10000m will affects the strategy and favour certain players, so too do the substance of the rules ranking military power or democracy favour certain countries over others in any competition.[59]

So far we have elaborated rule governed nature of status competition and the specific processual-relational logic that it produces. We now turn to the question I have hitherto avoided: *why* would states and citizens be moved to compete in state-status competitions? I have deliberately separated the relational logic of status competition from the reasons why one might compete in a status competition in order to unmoor status competition from its connection to motivation and any substantive type of behavior. This is crucial because in the following chapter I will develop a framework for identifying how logic of status competition manifests in practice without requiring the analyst to attempt to infer motivations.

Why compete in a Status Competition?

In the popular imagination, athletes in the Ancient Greek Olympics are often presumed to compete for glory and honour. This was certainly a big part of the story. The athletes took part were concerned with displaying "excellence" in the valued attributes that Hellenic society held in high esteem: manly beauty, courage, staying power in battle (Faulkner, 2012). The prizes reflected this concern for signalling social status: gold, silver, and ivory ornaments, and elaborate embroideries, in other words "phenomenal prestige goods, designed not for use but for display and donation"(Faulkner, 2012, p.385). However, motivation could not be reduced to status and prestige alone. Winners at the Ancient Olympics "star status" ensured they could expect invitations to the vast number of financially-incentivised games that took place in other cities all year round. Meanwhile, because Olympic success generated prestige for the city and joy to its citizens, Olympians were rewarded handsomely by their home town should they return home victorious. As we shall see, the status competitions of international

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[58] Indeed, since the 1990s the number of country performance indexes has ballooned (See graph in Cooley, 2015, p. 5): international society has more than 200 international indicators, grading performance in democracy, gender equality, healthcare provision, alongside with the familiar longer standing material metrics in GDP, HDI, and Credit Ratings.
[59] As Lilach Gilady (2018) has convincingly argued big, expensive, visible boats (battleships and lately aircraft carries) have been consistently been demanded at higher levels than submarines because of their symbolic utility for status/prestige.

politics reflect a similar mix of incentives. Indeed, the IR-status literature provides three solid answers to this question that mirror the Olympics: prizes, pride and pleasing the in-group.

The *prizes* for status competitions consist of the rewards that others bestow upon a state for achieving recognised status on a given hierarchy. Crucially, the rewards for ranking high on a status hierarchy are *independent* from whether the government and population is ethically, analytically, or emotionally invested in the criteria of the hierarchy and their position within it. For instance, realists have posited that ranking high on whatever counts for military power may provide the prize of deterrence and deference, and perhaps a seat at important tables. It does not matter whether the state or its population consider the power ranking just or even an accurate measure of power; if they value the prizes they may well still compete. However, other rankings also provide prizes. Scoring high on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index encourages external investment, *regardless* of whether business is actually easier,[60] or whether the country agrees with the measure of easy business. Similarly, Transparency International's ranking of perception of corruption is (rightly) contested in terms of how valid a measure it is of corruption (De Maria, 2008), yet because it is tied to development aid and indeed credit ratings, avoiding a low score is instrumentally valuable to states (Bruner & Abdelal, 2005, p. 199-200). As such they may have strong incentives to try to rise the rankings. However, the prizes that incentivise states need not only be economic and security based (though these are in many cases powerful and the easiest to observe). A leader and citizenry might enjoy the international praise and backpatting they can expect from topping the list of aid donators, similarly states might place a value on avoiding the international opprobrium that may follow from finishing low (Johnston, 2001, p.500). In short, a state might compete for the prizes associated with a status competition that the leader, government, or citizens take no pride in winning.

Quite distinct from the prizes bestowed upon winners, is the *pride or* "intrinsic" rewards for competing in a status competition. As Ringmar notes "people do not generally engage in them [competition] because of what they can win, but instead because of who or what the game allows them to be. (1996, p.3)". SIT based accounts. reaches the same conclusion but from different roots, claiming that people generate pride and self-esteem (and risk shame) based upon inter-group *comparisons* vis a vis significant others. One way a group can achieve this is

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[60] See Schueth (2015) on how Georgia managed to move up the Ease of Doing Business rankings by 82 places (record), while staying in more or less the same position on The World Economic Forum's annual Global Competitiveness Index.

to compete to improve "the relative positions of the in-group" vis a vis "the out-group on salient dimensions" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.44). In international relations this underwrites approaches that treat the state like a human (Larson and Shevchenko 2003; 2010;2019), and approaches that specify that leaders are likely to invest their self-esteem in the state's status (e.g. Renshon, 2016; 2017). Although recognition could be conceived of as a reward, and thus a prize, for a competitor to rest their esteem upon a competition requires they consider its rules legitimate and value the game. If player competes in a game they do not value, neither playing the game nor winning it, can generate self-esteem or shame. From this perspective, if one adds this social dimension to game theory, it may not be the material loss of being the sucker that matters, it is the fear of being *known as the sucker*.

Finally, the third reason for *a state* to compete in a status competition can be termed *pleasing the group*. Similar to how the Greek city state may subsidise its potential athletes in the hope of fostering civic pride, so the leaders may compete for status for their group in order to generate solidarity and pride among the group's members (Ward, 2013; 2017). In international relations this becomes especially visible when leaders or the opposition deliberately stoke nationalism (encouraging rallying-around-the-flag), for political gain. While this mechanism depends upon the second – in that it requires group-members rest their self-esteem upon and act to improve or maintain social position—it is analytically separate in an important regard. The leader or members of the government need not themselves be invested in the status competition but only understand that their citizens are, and thus that their legitimacy, popularity and to some extent, authority rests upon it. Indeed, as the pioneers of SIT in social psychology Tajfel and Turner (1978, p.44) note, where possible, "low status may tend, in conditions of unsatisfactory social identity, to promote the widespread adoption of individual mobility strategies": leaving the social group. Even if leaving is not an option, if membership does not allow the individual to make positive comparisons, they may dis-identify with the group and prove less willing to make sacrifices on its behalf (Tajifel and Turner, 1978). As a result, leaders face strong incentives to help their citizens make positive competitive comparisons with other states. Indeed, as Ned Lebow has argued, if we can recognise that leaders face incentives to quench the material appetites of their populations, then if people—especially nationalists— invest their self-esteem in their states' status, then leaders and governments have good reason to take this into account too (Lebow, 2010, p.63; see also Ward, 2017a, p.37-38). Yet, this mechanism need not be strictly tied to pride and esteem of the citizens, as chapter V suggests, citizens may just consider

relative international ranking and status in a given activity to be an appropriate measure of their governments' performance.

Thus, there are at least three social mechanisms that may incentivise competing in a status competition and two (prizes and group-pleasing) that do not require the government to intrinsically care about the status competition. Moreover, this implies that it is quite possible for different members of a group (or citizens of the state) to care about the status competition for different reasons. For instance, some members of a group may wish to compete in a nuclear arms race because they consider it essential for deterrence, others may take pride in besting the rival group. Given this dissertation aims to investigate how activities become discursively constituted as status competitions, how the rules are formed and contested, and with what consequence for legitimating policy, I can remain ambivalent about exactly how much causal weight each mechanism accounts for, even if it were possible to assess.

Instead of trying to disentangle these mechanisms in analysis, I will instead use them as a warrant for flipping the usual methodological MO of status research. Instead of using a rational economic or security maximizing model as the baseline, and treating status as a residual, I assume that *ceterus paribus* states have several social mechanisms pushing them to compete for status, and as such the logic of status competition should be widespread in international relations.[61] The methodological procedure will therefore involve drawing case specific narratives that explore how status competition within international politics *departs* from the ideal (Jackson, 2010; see chapters II & III). In particular, as I argued in the introduction, there are good reasons to expect different groups within the state may not agree on the rules of the status hierarchy and that these rules may not prove stable as any given status competition unfolds. Thus, we should be able to study how divergent and changing representations the status hierarchy in circulation in a domestic discourse make possible particular policy outcomes.

Towards the Grammar of Status

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[61] Although I emphasize here the positive reasons for why status competition can be used as a baseline, it is possible to make the negative case against assuming wealth maximisation and especially security should be the default assumption. For instance, given so few states these days get "selected out" in the manner neo-realists suggest "anarchy" enables and encourages, states have a great deal of leeway to pursue other goals. Big states in particular can pursue extremely inefficient security policies before their territorial integrity is threatened. It is for this reason that I do not find the common claim that security policy is a "hard case" for status very compelling. In fact, given the close historical association of war and military capabilities with great power status, I would be amazed if status dynamics did not emerge in security affairs. Indeed, we now have numerous works documenting precisely this (e.g. Gilardy, 2018; Pu & Schweller, 2014; Renshon, 2017 to name just a few).

This chapter has laid the groundwork for developing a theoretical framework capable of identifying the logic of status competition as it manifests in discourse. I argued that because prior work has tended to define status competition in terms of the substance of the international hierarchy and generally understated the rule-governed nature of status competition, I had to go back to the drawing board. First, in my account, the ideal of status competition is only possible in rank-ordered hierarchy based upon changeable metrics of performance. This type of hierarchy produces the *relationship* of rivals rather than a) club hierarchies which produce the relationship of student/teacher or gatekeeper/applicant or b) a fixed hierarchy of superiority/inferiority, such as a caste system. Second, given that all rankings require rules to define good and bad performance, I argued that for an ideal typical status competition to ensue, it requires inter-subjective agreement over those rules, lest competitors find themselves playing different games. Third, I argued that competing in rank-ordered hierarchy produces a specific processual-relational dynamic whereby ascertaining performance requires continuous comparison to others. This sets status apart from individualistic logics such as wealth maximisation or abstract rule following. Finally, I argued that there are solid reasons why a state might compete in status competition and there is no a priori need to define status competition in terms of motivation for status. However, I suggested that these mechanisms are sufficient to use as a baseline for analysis instead of conventional approaches that give analytical priority to wealth or security.

Although several factors inhibit the ideal international status competition from being realised (see introduction), I contend that this does not foreclose the logic of status competition from informing government policy. Instead, the difficulty of reaching agreement over the rules of the game and the possibility of self-recognition mean that domestic actors can frame a policy and act, *as if* they are in a status competition—*a processual-relational, rule governed competition for relative position*—even if the other players do not agree to the same rules or are not paying attention. It is the prevalence of states conducting activities that *resemble* competitions for status – in which the logic is visible – that I would argue explains why status seeking appears so widespread in international affairs even if "international" hierarchies are often ambiguous and contested. Thus, before turning to the cases, the next chapter develops what I call "the grammar of status", which lays out a toolkit for recognising the logic of status competition as it is deployed in domestic political discourse. This heuristic device allows the empirical investigation of whether and how rival theories of international status hierarchies are used to (de)legitimate government policies.

Chapter II

The Grammar of Status Competition

You don't need to eat so quickly! It's not a competition.

The Cambridge Dictionary's example sentence for "competition"

Introduction

To illuminate how the logic of status competition can manifest practice without the ideal being realised, I will begin with a brief vignette. When I was an English teacher,[62] I would often put my students into pairs and encourage them to practice speaking by giving them a series of open ended questions to discuss. The point of the activity was to "maximise student talk time", and give them an opportunity to practice the new language they were learning. Although practice for its own sake was the stated-goal, at least one pair of students would race through the questions and proudly declare that they were "finished!" in one fifth of the time allocated. At which point, I would usually exclaim: "It's not a competition! There are no prizes for coming first". Indeed, most people will be familiar with this refrain for when a person treats an activity like a competition when it is not intended as such. The fact that *The Cambridge Dictionary* lists it among its example sentences for explaining the meaning of competition would indicate this is not an uncommon situation. Its prevalence might seem to illustrate evolutionary biologists' claim that humans are "hard-wired" to compete for position (Paul, et al. 2014, p18). Yet even if we are born with the urge to compete, it does not tell us *how* to compete in a given context. Indeed, this example also illustrates humans' remarkable ability to *conceptualise* near any activity as a relative competition for position, a race for first place.[63] Without prompting, the students had conceived of their own rules and imposed them upon the activity – answer all the questions in the shortest time possible—and set about racing to "victory".[64] The students may even have felt pride in their "status" as the winner too. Indeed, the students theorized, competed and won in a competition of their own making. It did not require anybody else to share the same rules of the game (finishing the activity first), for those rules to shape the students' decision to answer the questions as quickly as possible.

The point of this little vignette is to illustrate how the logic of status competition can obtain and explain human behaviour, even when nobody else is playing the same game. I argue that analogous "imaginary competitions" can operate and inform government policy. However, unlike our students, states (or more precisely, governments) must justify their actions to

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[62] Between 2004 and 2011, I was an English teacher in Poland, Czech Republic, Japan, UK, Argentina, and Norway.

[63] As Onuf (1989, p 266-270) explains, to strive for first position requires one to ascertain the evaluation criteria upon which to rank, logically prior to any efforts to compete.

[64] If the urge to compete might be hard-wired at birth to some extent, the notion of how to compete must surely be social. I would suggest that students prior experience of competing in other activities led to them to assume that speed was the crucial criteria.

public audiences and consequently leave behind a textual trail.[65] As such, rather than striving to infer motivation from actions, the analyst can study patterns of legitimation via discourse.[66]

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to explicating how 1) the logic status competition can be conceived as a mode of discursive legitimation, and 2) how we can recognise it when it is manifested in policy discourse. To this second end, I elaborate what I call the " Grammar of Status Competition": a meta-linguistic means of recognising the logic of status competition as it manifests in language without "status" needing to be uttered as a rationale. Here, I leverage the processual-relational logic outlined in the previous chapter to develop a lens for identifying theories of status competitions as they manifest in discourse, as well as their political effects. Crucially, by focusing on what speaking status *does* and the *effects* it *has* in practice, we can study status and its effects without assuming (and reifying) a fixed international social structure, or trying to infer motivations. To get there, I must first begin by spelling out the discursive ontology that underpins this analysis.

Status as Legitimation

States are extremely talkative. This is because the people and the bureaucracies that perform a state's activities must continuously justify their activities undertaken in the name of the state. As Ronald Krebs (2015, p. 14) notes, "[l]egitimation—the articulation before key publics of publicly acceptable reasons for concrete actions and policy positions—is typically an imperative, not a mere nicety, of politics, both domestic and foreign". To be sure, Krebs notes, most of a state's day-to-day activities do not come under much public scrutiny, however "in large-scale, bureaucratic nation-states, policies must be, at least, capable of public legitimation." (ibid, p.14). Yet, given that most policies are ongoing, legitimation is rarely a one off action, but a continuous process (Jackson,2006, p.16) Consequently, states produce continuous supply of textual representations of the social world within which they operate (also see Hanson, 2006, chapters 2-3) Here, legitimation via these texts enjoys "a 'prosthetic' character: simultaneously revealing and producing the world under investigation" (Jackson, 2006, p.16, note 7).   I will turn to the ontological assumptions that underpin this

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[65] While the student could construct the rules of his imaginary competition, and decide to compete without justification, a state's government routinely must legitimate its policy decisions to its citizenry.
[66] See Jackson, 2006; Krebs, 2018; Hanson, 2006 for a good examples of research that centres on processes of legitimation.

understanding of texts shortly. However, for now, it is sufficient to note that this implies that state bureaucracies leave behind substantial evidence of their legitimation of particular policies, which in turn the analyst can use as primary data.[67] Thus, one methodological implication is that we can study policy legitimation by tracing these texts.

However, if states had perfect flexibility to legitimate anything they pleased by whatever means they preferred, studying legitimation would not provide any analytical purchase upon state actions. However, most governments do not have such flexibility: not all potential activities can be legitimated, and not all logics of legitimation work for a given policy. Instead, the range of reasons that could be used to legitimate a given policy are bound – pre-structured – by the social context within which governments operate (Hansen, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Krebbs, 2018). At a minimum, a government cannot legitimate a policy in reference to something that the audience does not understand.[68] Second, and crucially, the reason given has to resonate with its audience. For instance, if a leader of a secular country attempted to use a religious text to legitimate a policy, it would be unlikely to succeed, even if the audience were familiar with the religious text. Conversely, a leader of a religious country may struggle to legitimate a policy if they do not relate it to scriptures. Although the discursive resources available to a government limit the scope of legitimate action, they are not determinative (Diez, 1999, p.611). Actors have agency to improvise, alter, and combine in imaginative new ways, the intersubjective materials at their disposal to render a policy legitimate (Jackson, 2006, p.27-29, p.39-41; see also Ringmar, 2012, p.18). This notion of improvisation and adaption allows a degree of agency to frame the world in different ways that do not depend entirely either on the essence of the world, or the social structure within which an actor operates (Jackson, 2006, p.15-16; 25-26; Hansen, 2006, p.7). In the process, individual acts of representation and legitimation contribute to the social resources available to future legitimation efforts.

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[67] To be clear, to study legitim*ation* is to study what reasons worked in a concrete social context to render the particular course of action legitimate, *not* how well it fits with some notion of an objective abstract notion of legitimacy or how accurately it depicts reality (Jackson, 2006 p.16-19). For instance, this view of legitimation implies that if a scholar wanted to explain how a state came to use God's will to justify a law banning shops from opening on Sundays, it would not help to discover whether god really cares about Sunday work, nor whether it matched the scholars abstract notion of a legitimate law. Instead, she would be better off investigating how the society came to consider god's wishes a legitimate justification for public policy.

[68] In post-structuralist language, this is called inter-textuality: the need to refer to some idea already in circulation, in order for it to be intelligible (see Hansen, 2006, p. 7) Lest this sound banal it is not: tracing the conditions of possibility for the sayable and thus thinkable is a basic premise of the genealogical method (see Vucetic, 2011a).

A crucial ontological and methodological implication flows from this way of understanding legitimation: legitimation has no necessary relationship to motivation. Indeed, one result of treating the state as a human, which stems from translating psychological and sociological theories of status into IR, is that status tends to be understood as an internal motivation rather than a mode of legitimation. This has the downstream methodological consequence of treating words uttered by states mainly as a means of inferring motivation, rather than as ontologically significant in terms of legitimating the action they explain. Lest this appear merely a semantic alteration, it is useful to juxtapose my ontological assumptions about language with the conventional neo-realist attitude to words spoken by governments: "talk is cheap" (e.g. Mearchseimer, 2010, p.383). The argument runs as follows: given governments' opportunity and incentives to lie, instead of listening to what they say, analysts should focus on what they do. Simplifying, the result is that neorealist-inspired scholarship produce theories that assume states' motivations – whether it be security, wealth, or latterly, status – and then develop hypothesis about what sort of outcomes such a motivation would produce given x y z objective conditions.[69] Whether the policy outcome matches up to the theoretical expectation matters, the social processes that take place in between the input and the output are at best only epistemologically useful as a proxy to ascertain motivation, or at worst mere noise that can be safely ignored (see also, Ringmar, 1996, p.35).

In contrast, scholars assuming that states/governments must always legitimate their actions in reference to some sort of limiting social structure, can remain ambivalent about motivations.[70] Without pondering motivation at all, securitization scholars investigate how threats become threats via securitization processes (Buzan, et al. 1998). When investigating the securitization of migration in the EU (e.g. Huysmans, 2000), it is neither here nor there for the securitization scholar whether the securitizing actors *believe* the migrants are a threat to national security, or are *motivated* by security. The question is whether the securitization move was sufficient to legitimate breaking 'the normal rules of politics' (Buzan, et al, 1998 p. 32). Similarly, investigating how status was implicated in the public legitimation of policies can generate analytical purchase on outcomes without recourse to speculating about motivations or assuming them.

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[69] For instance, structural realists assume that states are driven by fear, which under anarchy they argue implies states will pursue self-help strategies: balancing, bandwagoning, building up armed forces, forming alliances etc, depending on the position in material (military power-based) structure of the system.
[70] Following Wittgenstein (1958), scholars that study legitimation tend not only to be sceptical that the researcher can access motivations (or beliefs), but they doubt whether people themselves even know why they do what they do (see: Jackson, 2006, Hanson, 2006).

A second analytical advantage of treating legitimation as locus of status-related political action rather than motivation, is that this opens up cases in which status may have been implicated in legitimation processes, but because the outcome seems "rational" it is overlooked. This is because the conventional methodological procedure of status research tends to take security or wealth as a baseline interest, and use status as an explanation for policies that deviate from this expectation (e.g. Gilady, 2018, p.30; Pu & Schweller, 2014, p.143; de Caravalho & Neumann, 2015, p.15).[71] Although this residual has been shown to be far larger than hitherto believed, it does not exhaust the ways that status can influence outcomes. It is quite possible that policies that make sense from a materialist-rationalist theoretical perspective were in fact legitimated in reference to status hierarchies, and may not have been possible otherwise. For instance, Chapter 7 explores how Norway undertook a series of education reforms in the 2000s that were constructed as necessary and urgent because Norway had finished only mid-table on the PISA international education rankings. Reforming education with the goal of improving education performance is standard practice for states seeking to maximise public utility, and as such would not ordinarily capture status scholar's attention. Yet, through tracing the processes of legitimation in the public discourse, it is clear that representations of Norway's international status in education were crucial to understanding the timing of the policy, the shape it took, and were arguably necessary for them to be undertaken at all. Ultimately, prior status research has given us strong reason to believe status matters, but the methodological convention of assuming a materialist rationalist baseline risks drastically understating the extent to which representations of international status have affected policy outcomes.

However, to analyse patterns of legitimation requires we treat language and texts as ontologically significant in international relations. The following section thus outlines the assumptions about language, texts, and discourses that underpins this approach, before turning to how these assumptions inform my framework for studying international status competition as a discursive practice.

Productivity of Language & The Politics of Meaning Production

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[71] As a result, a great deal of status research resembles – and shares the shortcomings of – "thin constructivist" research that strives to show how ideas and beliefs can account for left-over variance once rational interests have been taken in to account. For a critical discussion, see: Laffey and Weldes (1997).

To investigate legitimation via texts requires conceiving of language as *productive* rather than merely (imperfectly) reflective of reality. This way of conceiving of language, widely used by discourse analysts, has a strong pedigree and has become established within IR at least since the 1990s.[72] However, it has some crucial ontological and methodological implications for studying international status that are not self-evident, and thus require elaborating.[73] Firstly, following, speech act theorists I treat speaking, writing and texts, as acts in and of themselves: "in saying something we do something" (Austin 1975, p. 94). When the bride and groom say "I do" at their wedding, it does more than describe an external reality, just as signing a treaty has effects beyond the scribbles on the paper (Diez, 1999). Further, I assume that actors' words are simultaneously implicated in both describing the world, *and* legitimating the response to that world (see Jackson, 2006, p 16, note: 7). For instance, when one describes a person as a terrorist, it has legitimating and delegitimizing effects: it can serve as a justification for striving to capture the person (we must go get em'!), while simultaneously delegitimizing inaction (We cannot let the terrorist escape!). Similarly, representations of a social hierarchy of actors may serve to legitimate action undertaken to move up (we are losing the race; we must do better!). Treating *speaking as doing* in this way implies that descriptions of the world also justify a response to it, and texts are turned from (dubious) proxies for inferring motivation or beliefs, into ontologically significant actions in themselves, and a political, meaning producing force in their own right.[74]

Indeed, this dissertation assumes that language can never constitute a neutral vehicle of comprehension and thus legitimation. Contra positivists, a discursive approach assumes the social world contains no inevitable, natural or pre-discursive facts, only an evolving stock of context bound, shared-meanings that should be understood as an ongoing feat of human construction (Doty, 1996). Lest this sound like meta-babble, the meaning of a humble dog can

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[72] Stretching at least from Nietzsche, through Wittgenstein, From Speech Act theorists to Foucault and Derrida. There are major differences between these theories of language but they all share rejection of the correspondence principle and the notion of language as merely a "conduit" (Fierke, 2002; also Diez 1999, Milliken, 1999; Epstein, 2013) For classic "empirical" analyses in this genre in IR see: Campbell, (1992); Neumann (1997); Crawford, (2002) Leira (2019).

[73] It also remains controversial and widely misunderstood in mainstream circles Political Science. The notion that meaning is produced in practice rather than a function of external reality is often conflated with idealism and the denial of reality. In fact, discourse analysts do not deny reality beyond discourse, they are merely ambivalent about it (see Hansen, 2006pp-19-20 for a robust defence of this position against the accusations of idealism).

[74] For neopositivists meaning is given by the object being described and thus language role is to reflect reality to the best possible extent and it becomes judged by how well it "fits" with that external phenomenon. This notion of language leads to striving for better and better definitions of objects (Fierke, 2002). In contrast, if one treats language as never neutral but productive and political, it is senseless to try to ascertain a better fit with reality, but only to ask how selecting one representation over another has political effects

serve to illustrate what this discursive theory of meaning-construction implies for analysis. Nothing about the physical qualities of a dog can allow the observer to infer in advance whether it the dog is lucky enough to live as pet or a get eaten as food.[75] The answer to question has nothing to do with how well the material qualities of the dog "fit" with the external material reality (see Laffey & Weldes, 2002, p.202). Instead, the dog's meaning depends upon the representational practices of the social context within which it exists. Borrowing Foucault's metaphor, our meaning production practices resemble a *"regime* of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p.131); the regime may *appear* fixed, but zoom in, and it is *necessarily* always temporally and spatially bounded, and depends upon many people's disparate and diverse micropractices, not unlike a political regime. For instance, each person that pats a dog or talks about dogs as pets, are implicated in the reproduction of the meaning of dogs as pets. While the meaning of an object – dog, husband, or terrorist— may appear so stable it becomes taken for granted, for a discourse analyst, this stability in meaning is considered as an illusion brought about by constant discursive labour (see: Neumann 1999, p35-36). In this way humans "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p 54) and language becomes not just a means of apprehension but a "reality producing force" (Shapiro, 2012, p. 21).

Consequently, because the meaning of any given thing is assumed to depend upon ongoing practice and bounded by the spatial and temporal limits of discursive practices, such an approach also opens up for critical questions of resistance and change. If people cease talking about and treating dogs as pets, it will open up space for rival discourses to imbue the local dogs with alternative meaning—perhaps these former pets will become constituted as vermin and instead of patting dogs, people begin shooting them. Similarly, if one steps outside the spatial limits of the UK's pet regime of truth –then we may happen upon dog meat.[76] As the metaphor of the regime captures, these processes of meaning production are not "politically innocent" (Diez, 1999 p.599). For instance, it matters very much for the dog if her local humans represent her as a food or a pet. Similarly, it matters very much whether a person is constituted as a terrorist or a freedom fighter. Consequently, it becomes fruitful for the critical scholar to investigate "the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another" (Cambpell, 1992, p.7); in this dissertation the consequences of adopting one theory of international hierarchy over another.

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[75] I have found when lecturing on post-structuralism, using the mundane example of a dog helps students concentrate on the theory of discourse rather than on the politics of the referent.

[76] At the time of writing Nigeria, China and Vietnam permit eating dog.

To be clear, treating language as a productive force does not imply that humans are at liberty to create meaning out of nowhere. Rather, each utterance is recursive in that it must refer back to the pattern of representational practices – the discourse – which people are embedded.[77] In other words, each utterance both depends upon for intelligibility upon prior representational practices, but also in a small way reproduces, replenishes, and may well modify the discourse. Discursive practices can thus be thought of as "linguistic structurationalism" (Diez, 1999, p. 603). It is with this structurationalist process in mind that in the analysis chapters I will often refer to the words written in newspapers, uttered by politicians, and research by academics as "*re*presentations"—because they both present reality anew, but also re-present that reality (Neumann, 2008, p.61). It is this discursive context that governments must refer (and reproduce) when legitimating a policy. The upshot is that for governments the prevailing discourses limit (but do not determine) and enable (but do not "cause", in the Humean sense), the possible justifications available to enact policy (Diez, 1999, p. 611). Methodologically then, texts become primary data that can be treated as both 1) a productive force that has political effects and, 2) as a window into a broader pattern of meaning that was at sayable and intelligible in the context within which it was uttered. This implies that the analyst can trace how particular meanings emerge, are contested, become sedimented and/or wither over time and space, and assess the political consequences. In the case of this dissertation: how discursively (re)produced theories of international status hierarchies inform (or not) policy outcomes.

International Hierarchies as Domestic Discourse

With these understandings of legitimation and discourse in hand, we are now in a better position to elaborate the *grammar of status competition*: how the logic "international" status competition becomes visible and consequential in domestic discourse. As I elaborated above, the main, and indeed major difference, between the grammar of status I will present and the extant status literature in IR is that I conceive of language as *productive* of the object rather than reflective. Similar to how a successful securitizing move can understood to produce a threat, so too I will argue that when an actor mobilizes the grammar of status they produce a social hierarchy, designating (potentially) socially valuable status positions. Such an approach allows us to zoom in and analyse how people are implicated in (re)producing—via

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[77] The exception to this proves the rule: the gibberish spoken by a madman, or a religious person speaking in tongues would count as non-recursive discourse (at least not one amenable to analysis).

discursive practice—the hierarchies within which they understand themselves to exist. The point here is to focus on how actors *re*-present or theorize their state's position and how they act upon that understanding. From this perspective, when a leader gives a speech comparing their state and another, they are— in that moment— (re)producing a hierarchy *not* making an assessment of an objective state of affairs that the analyst can evaluate for truthiness. Further, following the prior discussion, that representation is also potentially implicated in legitimating the response to that world it describes.

This approach implies that *international* status is not a fact "out there" to be discovered, independently recognizable, accessible, and salient to all, and instead treats people's understanding of their states' status as *produced* via practice within a localized discourse(s).[78] This ontological move makes it possible for "local" interpretations of international hierarchies to be insulated from foreign representations, and crucially for this dissertation, analyse how these representations of international hierarchies emerge, change, a solidify and perhaps contested within the social contexts within which they are articulated and instantiated.[79] Whether the representation matches up to some objective assessment of the international hierarchy is immaterial unless those alternative assessments feature in the social context within which the actor is operating. What matters for my analysis is whether that representation of international hierarchy was implicated in the legitimation the policy and if so *how.* A key assumption I make then, is that for a *social* hierarchy to have political/social effects it must be inter-subjectively known and salient to the people involved. However, although the hierarchies must be inter-subjectively invoked and produced to have effects, the people involved need not simultaneously understand themselves to be "motivated" by status: They may invoke the logic/grammar of status without consciously reflecting upon it. For instance, when an opposition party seeks to shame the government by making a negative comparison with other states, they may not realise that they are delegitimating the states behaviour by invoking *competitive* status hierarchy.

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[78] The SIT notion of social creativity may appear to capture this, but in fact they retain the notion of independently observable hierarchies that observers and governments can access alike. Governments might disagree with what *should* count as status – and pursue social creativity to try to change the hierarchy— but they can readily observe and agree upon what status currently *is.*
[79] To be clear, it is certainly possible for an analyst to construct and position people and states within a hierarchy that they envision to be external to the actors and produce insightful findings. I am merely showing how one can also make hay with a discursive approach to status too.

All this implies quite a substantial ontological shift from most prior status research.[80] It is therefore useful to clarify this difference and its implications by juxtaposition with the paradigmatic definition of international status. In the seminal edited volume of contemporary research, Paul and colleagues define "status as collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Paul et al, 2014, p.7). In contrast, I define status as *a position in social hierarchy* and *status competition as a processual-relational, rule governed competition for relative position*. While they are in the same ballpark, my definition does not require the researcher to access people's beliefs.[81] Instead, my definition of social hierarchy requires only that representations of an international hierarchy be *social*: intersubjectively available (not private and or subjective) in a given context.[82] When taken together with the previous chapters discussion about the difference between individual and group identity and status, this has crucial analytical and methodological implications. Representations of a state's position in an "international" hierarchy still constitute a *social* hierarchy even if the subjects representing the position are all members of the same group.[83] Moreover, following the discussion above about legitimation, these context-bound representations – even if they are not shared by members of other groups – can still be meaningful and acted upon by those members of the group. Intersubjectivity need not imply intersubjectivity between *group* "subjects". This move thus negates the difficult methodological task of trying to second guess the "collective beliefs" different countries' populations or elites hold. Instead, it allows me to zoom on the discrete discursive contexts whereby representations international" hierarchies are instantiated and contested in the concrete processes of policy (de)legitimation.

Nonetheless, treating status as discursive has been alluded to in prior "conventional" status research, even if it has not been fully-fleshed out theoretically. Akin to how Stephen Walt (1990) set the stage for securitization theory when he incorporated "threat perception" into

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[80] Though not quite *all* extant status research: Pouliot's (2014, 2016) practice turn approach shares a similar scientific ontology and inductive methodology.

[81] The other difference is more trivial: I would argue that *any* activity or quality could become constituted as a valued attribute constitutive of a social hierarchy. However, I suspect that Paul and colleagues would agree and that their definition did not mean to imply a finite list of status attributes. Certainly, their surrounding theoretical discussion does not suggest as much.

[82] See Jackson (2006) and (Buzan, et al, 1998) for a discussion of the difference between subjectivity versus intersubjectivity

[83] As noted in the introduction, states status operates differently from individual status in a crucial way. States contain people and groups that can acknowledge and recognise their representations of their groups own status. Unlike the perceptions or beliefs of an individual, representations of a groups status are social: they exist in the intersubjective realm of discourse.

his theory of alliance formation, so too does Wohlforth (2009, p.30) when he theorizes that status competition is likely to occur when "decision makers identify with the states they represent" and decide to "*frame* issues as positional disputes over status in a social hierarchy"(my emphasis). Indeed, this formulation strongly alludes to a degree of domestic-interpretative agency to decide what to frame – construct - as a positional competition. However, Wohlforth's theoretical interest—linking polarity to the frequency status competition—means that he does not flesh out what this framing involves. Nor does he explore the theoretical implications that are implied by framing: that governments have agency (and the opposition too) to "frame" different activities as status competitions. And crucially for this dissertation, nor does Wohlforth consider how domestic actors might frame the same activity in multiple different hierarchical ways: creating and contesting status hierarchies of a group's own making. The next section thus unpacks what is loosely captured by Wohlforth's notion of "framing", to develop a systematic means of recognising the logic of status competition when it becomes manifested in domestic discourse and implicated in the legitimation of policy.

The Grammatical Units of Status Competition

The previous chapter detailed an idealized logic of status competition: a processual-relational, rule governed competition for relative position. In the real world, the Olympics and its constituent events, embody this logic and constitute a near perfect example of an international status competition. Indeed, individuals competing on behalf of their group (states, or city states) compete in relational contests of strength, agility, speed etc. The criteria for victory are agreed upon by all competitors beforehand and the winning collectives reap both prizes and pride. I argue that the logic embodied in this ideal is manifest, visible, and often consequential in domestic discourse about the international, even if it a fully blown status competition is seldom realised. We can recognise the logic by looking out for what I call the "grammar of status competition": particular discursive representations that embody, and thus instantiate, the logic of status competition in practice. Following Fierke (2002) and Buzan and colleagues (1998),I use the term grammar here to refer to a meta-linguistic framework that operates across varying contexts while still retaining a family resemblance:

> A grammar is the range of possible expressions belonging to a category of experience. As Wittgenstein said, "A grammar tells us what kind of object anything is" (Wittgenstein, 1958: para. 373). A grammatical investigation is therefore one that looks into the possibilities of phenomena. For instance, we have a grammar of marriage. This would include language

games such as saying "I do" in the context of a Christian wedding ceremony or stamping a piece of glass in a Jewish one. This is a speech act in the sense that it is not just saying something; it is acting, with the result of confirming the creation of a marriage. This language game belongs to a larger grammar. (Fierke 2002, drawing on Wittgenstein, 1958, several footnotes removed).

In a similar vein, by developing a grammar of status competition, I am seeking to provide a systematic means of investigating the possible expressions of status competition. It is crucial to note that this grammatical approach to status has a key advantage in that it avoids reifying the criteria for status hierarchies. Instead, like securitization, it is the enactment of the logic embodied in the grammar that determines what constitutes a status hierarchy, not a priori assumptions about what constitutes valued attributes nor the criteria by which they should be counted and compared.[84]

Moreover, this approach has the advantage of being able to identify the logic of status competition even when the words "status" or "hierarchy" are not used. The social world does not lend itself willingly to analysis. One way in which the fuzzing buzzing morass of social activity makes matters difficult is that the word games people play are messy and inconsistent: they play and bend the rules as they go along. One salient consequence is that people – policy makers included - in practice do not use the terms status, reputation and prestige consistently. Sometimes reputation may be used to refer to a positional competition, meanwhile the term "status" is often used in practice in ways that overlap and contradict my definition. However, the advantage of my definition of status competition is that it implies a distinct relational and relative logic that can be ascertained without the actor themselves using the word "status". Indeed, rather like how securitization theory does not require the word security to be uttered; instead it requires the logic of a securitization move. This implies that rather than looking out for the word "status" itself when studying discourse, the researcher must instead look out for a status move, identifiable by its grammar, which instantiates the logic of status of competition when uttered.

I will now elaborate the grammatical units of status competition and illustrate with examples. I argue, the following types of representations invoke and thus constitute competitive status

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[84] For instance, even though Wohlforth uses the term "framing", he assumes what substantive hierarchies (GDP, military personnel and Navy) matter, and thus how they are measured and the principle of comparison, prior to empirical analysis.

hierarchies: (1) superlatives[85] and competitive comparisons (2) positional identity constructions and (3) sports metaphors. I argue each grammatical unit on its own (no matter how momentary) invokes the logic status competition and can be used to legitimise and delegitimise particular courses of action. Given iteratively or used with a temporal dimension they can be deployed to produce status narratives, which legitimate action to arrest a decline in status, maintain status or improve position in a status hierarchy. In this sense, like other narratives, representations of status competition imply a course of action and thus tell an actor how to proceed (Ringmar, 1996; Subotic, 2016; Steele, 2008). I will then discuss how the grammar of status serves as a lens to illuminate my cases in chapter 5 through 7. The goal of developing this lens is to provide a "systematic production of empirical factual knowledge about political social arrangements" (Jackson, 2010, p.22). The system in question – looking out for how the grammar of status is instantiated and implicated in legitimation processes – serves both to facilitate and order my analysis, but also to aid transparency so the reader can assess how I reached my conclusions in chapter V, VI and VII.[86]

Competitive Comparisons

The basic unit of the grammar of status is statements in which a comparison with other, ostensibly similar, entities is invoked. As Nicholas Onuf (1989, p.267) notes a concern for status *must* always depend upon *global* comparison.[87] By "global" Onuf means comparing how one performs relative to others, rather than global in the geographic sense. This "ground of comparison" is necessarily relational to others: one cannot aim to be better or best at something without reference to other participant(s). Thus, global comparisons require the construction of ranking system: "The set, or whole, then consists of a series of positions occupying a complete and transitive ordering: first place, second place … last place. Furthermore, the places in such an ordering come with cardinal values (…). Only now can she say: I want to be best." (Onuf, 1989, p. 266). However, in practice, statements that make competitive comparisons between entities and instantiates a crude competitive hierarchy of status between X and Y whenever they utter a statement akin to X is better than Y at Z. It

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[85] To be clear, I mean superlative in the grammatical sense whereby it demarks the best *or* the worst, most *or* least. Although it overlaps, I should specify that I do not mean the everyday meaning of superlative which has an exclusively positive valence.

[86] Although I am now presenting it prior to analysis, I could well have been presented it as a conclusion to this dissertation as it is also partly a product of my cases. It was derived over the course of my PhD from my practical involvement with my subject matter: the body of work and theories pertaining to status, and through an inductive back and forth with my cases (see Jackson, 2010 chapter 5 on development of ideal types).

[87] Though Onuf uses the term "standing".

is crucial to emphasize (again) that to say that something is better than something else requires some principle of comparison by which to evaluate performance. It is thus theoretically impossible to make a competitive comparison without some sort of rule. Thus, even if an explicit ranking of rivals is not displayed, a comparison – *X is better than Y at Z*— also establishes the rules of a hierarchy. Within my framework, these representations/theories of international hierarchies need not be recognised as salient, valued, and credible by international audiences for it to become meaningful, only for audiences whose consent or acquiescence is required for the successful legitimation of an activity.

Using the discursive expression of relative comparisons as a basic unit in the grammar of status competition is broadly consistent with all strands of IR status research. Social Identity theory is the most explicit, it posits that individuals generate self-esteem from their ability to make positive comparisons with the outgroup on salient dimensions (see Tajifel and Turner, 1978; see Larson and Schevchenko, 2003; 2010; 2014). It is via these comparisons that assess their relative status, and experiencing shame and pride accordingly. Meanwhile, as noted, large N status research suggest states (or leaders) compare relative power of their country to ascertain whether they receive sufficient recognition or deference from their peers (e.g. Renshon 2017, Volgy et al. 2011) While it is not made central to their analysis, it is clear that these causal mechanisms pre-suppose the ability to make comparisons between states. Finally, Pouliot's practice turn approach shares our concern here for how status hierarchies are produced and acted upon in practice. Contra psychologists, which posit an innate urge to make positive comparisons, Vincent Pouliot (2014, p.197) suggests that because people are born into societies in which comparisons with those around them are unavoidable, status hierarchies quickly emerge through practice. Ultimately, making competitive comparisons a basic discursive unit of status hierarchies should be uncontroversial. With the exception of Pouliot (2014), the difference is the ontological status of those comparisons – I suggest they are productive rather than reflective of the social world.

To illustrate how actors may make competitive comparisons in policy debates and how these can exert (de)legitimation effects, let us turn to the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. As the crisis wore on in 2015, the UK began to come under pressure to accept more refugees from Syria. The government responded by asserting that it was the 2nd biggest financial contributor to the region in terms of aid. However, the pressure became especially intense when an image of a child (Alan Kurdi), found dead on a beach, captured the world's attention prompting urgent calls for something to be done (Adler-Nissen, Anderson, and Hansen, 2020,

p. 76) . Critical voices in parliament and the press drew attention to how the UK had accepted far less refugees than many other countries. For instance, one MP argued in parliament that "The number of refugees that this Government say they will take…is derisory compared with Germany, which in the last few days has taken in 17,000 refugees…. We will look back on this Government's mean response to this heart-rending humanitarian crisis and we will be ashamed."[88] Eventually, the UK government gave in to pressure and announced it would accept 20,000 refugees over the next 5 years. Meanwhile, France a week later announced it would take 21,000. Little had changed in the meantime to make accepting refugees any more efficient than sending money to the region, yet the government changed policy. It is noteworthy for our purposes here that the government and its critics constituted the UK as positioned in two *rival* status hierarchies. One sought to establish status in the moral hierarchy via financial contributions to the region, the other used the number of refugees accepted as the measure for moral status. In short, although an absolute legal standard exists, the specifics of appropriate behaviour for the UK was informed by contestations over which criteria should be used to assess relative moral performance and comparisons with how other countries responded. To be sure, international legal duty, altruistic impulses and the emotions the image generated provided the pressure do *something (*Adler-Nissen, et al,. 2020, p.77). However, the government sought to legitimate the specifics of the policy by reference to a status hierarchy of its own construction, but when challenged, it ceded to a theory based upon the number of refugees admitted into the country. This example illustrates how a government's theory of status can be invoked and contested in practice, and how the grammar of status competition can be involved in the legitimation of the timing and shape of a policy.

Competitive Positional Identities

Closely connected to comparisons of performance are what I call *positional identities*, which also instantiate status hierarchies when uttered. Here I draw upon identity-theorists that understands the self and the other as mutually constituted in discourse via boundary producing performances of difference (Ashley, 1989; Campbell 1992; Neumann 1996; Doty, 1996; Rumelli, 2004; Hansen 2006). In layman terms, central assumption is that to know what something is, is to know what it is not; to know what we are is to know what we are not. In constructivist jargon, the *Self* always necessitates an *Other*. Spelling out the implications of this way of theorizing identity formation, Hansen suggests identity should be understood as

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[88] Hansard, HC 08 September 2015 Vol 599 cc 267

"discursive, political, relational, and social" (Hansen, 2006, p.2); status can be understood in much the same manner. Indeed, like identity, status is relational— to have high status requires another to have low status. Status is discursive: statuses are not given by the entities themselves, but produced through discursive practice. Status is political; people contest and struggle for higher status and the outcomes of these struggles can have serious consequences. Status is social; a status, by definition, can never be private and can only be constituted inter-subjectively. Indeed, following de Carvalho and Neumann (2015) I suggest that status is *a subset of relationally formed identity:*[89] one that constitutes a higher or lower position in *social* hierarchy. While status is a type of identity, they are not quite synonyms. If identity is who one is, status is also the position *where* one is sat. One can seek higher status, but one cannot seek higher identity. Indeed, one cannot talk about a 'high identity' for instance, or 'seek identity'. Unlike identity then, the concept of status explicitly contains the *possibility* for competition and improvement: the goal of maintain or move up in position in a social hierarchy.[90] Indeed, a status *position* always implies a relationally formed hierarchy, meanwhile identity implies no necessary structural counterpart (compare Wendt 1992; Katzenstein 1996; Hansen; 2006).[91] As chapter 3 noted however, status clubs and fixed status hierarchies produce different relations between self/other than status competition. Thus the grammar of status *competition* requires that the positional-identity is constituted by relative performance in a changeable quality or attribute.

The archetypal positional identity that invokes status competition is that of the "leader/laggard". From my discursive perspective, when a state is represented as the "leader of the free world", it is not only juxtaposing itself with the non-free world, it is also juxtaposing itself to other free-worlders and in the process, instantiating a competitive

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[89]. Although Wendt (1999) popularized in IR the idea that identities can be pre-social, I rely here upon the assumption that all identities are socially formed through juxtaposition to some Other (Hansen, 2006; Neumann, 1997)

[90] One can live up to one's identity, one can seek recognition for an identity, but one cannot improve one's identity. Especially, when paired with the logic of appropriateness, this conceptualization struggles to account for change (Towns 2010; Sending; 2002) and I would argue status competition.

[91]While, symbolic interactionists' account of identity struggles to incorporate hierarchy (or arguably structure in general). As Rumelli (2004) notes, symbolic interactionism posits a convergence rather than divergence following interactions. Elsewhere, Towns (2010, 2012) critiques weak constructivists for focusing only on norm diffusion engenders homogenization, and ignoring how the spread of international society is also always stratifies, producing hierarchies in the process. Thick constructivist work which posits that meaning construction involves positing a privileged sign contra another, necessarily implies a relationally formed identity and broad hierarchy. However, these works have tended to focus on radical difference and Othering rather status rivalries as they are conceived here. As Hansen, 2006, and Rumelili independently note, this focus on radical othering is empirical choice, not a theoretically necessitated by discursive theories of identity construction. This would open up for frameworks that study systematically non-radical othering such as the rival-relations I associate with status competition.

hierarchy for leadership position. When protecting that leadership position is invoked to justify a course of action – "we must intervene lest we forsake our leadership of the free world"—then status competition becomes implicated in legitimation processes. To give a concrete example, the British (Labour) government's decision to build a new nuclear weapons system (Trident) was partially legitimated on the (curious) grounds that it was a "leader of nuclear disarmament" (Beaumont, 2015). This legitimation was co-constituted with a competitive comparison to other nuclear weapons states. It defined disarmament in terms of a) the number of nuclear weapons possessed by states, and b) included in the hierarchy only those states defined as "Nuclear Weapons States" under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.[92] Only by this very British construction of the disarmament hierarchy, could Britain's status as "leader" make sense (Beaumont, 2015).

Another, better known, but also ambiguous example of a competitive-positional identity in international relations is that of "Great Power". It is ambiguous because it is not clear that the criteria constituting a great power across space and time have always been based upon changeable criteria, nor if all of those criteria were relative in nature. For instance, Neumann (2008) has argued that recognition of greatpowerhood has never been strictly a function of relative power – though it has usually been crucial– but also a system of governance (see also: Bull, 1977). This latter quality would appear to operate as an absolute standard: in terms of legitimation it would be quite possible to strive for greatpowerdom by reforming the society in light of an absolute norm that was deemed necessary to entering a club. At other times, a seat at the top table of Europe was also a function of royal blood. As such, although the identity would be positional, it would not invoke a hierarchy that an actor could *compete* within. The upshot of this short discussion is that invoking a positional identity does not in itself invoke the logic of status competition. Instead, the discourse analyst must pay close head to the criteria and mode of comparison that constitutes a positional identity: whether it is based upon changeable criteria and relative comparisons.

Sports Metaphors

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[92] The Non Proliferation Treaty defines Nuclear Weapons States as those which tested a nuclear prior to 1967. This freezes the number of "Nuclear Weapons States"as the US, Russia, China, UK and France.

Finally, when the metaphor or analogy of sport is used to describe and illuminate a situation it frames the activity as a status competition. As Nietzsche observed, language is inherently and necessarily metaphorical. If sometimes we forget this, it is only metaphors are so entrenched in our language that we use them habitually without reflection (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003 [1980]). While they might be unavoidable the "metaphors we live by" structure our interpretations of reality in important ways that warrant critical reflection. In line with my productive ontology, when a leader invokes a sport metaphor it *does* something: it constitutes the situation as a sport and conjures up the logic of status competition. For instance, Lakoff (1991, p. 29) notes that when war is treated as competitive sport like chess, or as a sport, like football or boxing" it provides a:

> metaphor in which there is a clear *winner and loser*, and a clear end to the game. The metaphor highlights strategic thinking, team work, preparedness, the spectators in the world arena, *the glory of winning and the shame of defeat*. This metaphor is taken very seriously. There is a long tradition in the west of training military officers in team sports and chess. the military is trained to win.

In short, likening a social activity to a sport constitutes winning as an end in itself. The metaphor of sport or games does *not* encourage reflection about "pay offs". Quite the opposite: although game *theory* implies rational cost benefit analysis of outcomes, framing an activity as a game or a sport actually has the effect of reducing the value of activity to winning and losing, success or failure.[93] For instance, it is no good finishing a chess a game with higher value pieces than your opponent if they have checkmated you. Ringmar (1996, p.3) is especially lucid on this point and is worth quoting at length. Noting that people seldom only play games for the material prizes on offer, Ringmar notes:

> it is worth underlining the obvious, yet easily neglected, fact that we participate in games because we want to *excel over others*. Winning as such is what is important, not what-ever additional rewards winning might bring. And why, then, do people want to win? Simply put: because winning is desired by others; we want to win because others want to win. By winning we can manifest our superiority; we become 'winners', and everyone else is forced to recognise us as such.

For our purposes here, what matters is that when international relations is constructed as a competitive game it constitutes the value of an activity in relative terms and constitutes states as *rival* players with positional identities: winners and losers, laggards and leaders. As such,

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[93] It is somewhat ironic that for all the insights game theory can provide, the logic it embodies is quite unlike almost any competitive game: nobody would bother playing games or sports if they always ended up at Nash equilibria.

it also theorizes status hierarchy and instantiates the logic of status competition. As the following chapters will illustrate, sporting metaphors that draw upon familiar sports can help render intelligible in terms of international status otherwise complex and distant phenomena. For instance, chapter V shows how the winter Olympics were used to frame Norway's PISA rankings performance as an important status competition (Chapter 7). Meanwhile, likening the siege of Mafeking to a game of cricket (chapter 6) helped render the Boer as a rival against whom Britain could express pride from defeating.

Mobilizing the Grammar of Status Competition

Each grammatical unit taken alone invokes a status competition and provides a legitimation to proceed in a particular way. A representation of laggard implies striving to regain position, a sports metaphor impels one to compete in the "game". In this way the grammar of status competition enacts a simple plot: we must do X to maintain, improve, or regain our position in Y hierarchy. As such, representations of status competitions, enact a narrative that situates the collective in time and space, and legitimates a particular direction of travel. In the process, such representations direct focus away from the rules of the games – which they define in the act of instantiating a hierarchy— and towards strategies to compete. For instance, when the PISA rankings were successfully framed as a crucial a status competition in Norwegian politics, it prompted considerable debate amongst the left and the right about how best to improve performance. The left wanted to spend more on education the right wanted to instigate new testing procedures, while traditionalists suggested more discipline was needed. Amidst this debate, the veracity and legitimacy of the PISA ranking's rules were reproduced by both sides as they contested how best to compete. However, although the grammar of status works as a heuristic for identifying representations of status competition and the rules such representations embody, we cannot say a priori whether they will prove successful in legitimating a particular course of action. Instead, this requires close empirical analysis of the social context within which they take place.

When investigating whether and how the grammar of status competition is mobilized in to legitimate government activities, it is important to keep in mind alternative logics of legitimation that may have informed an outcome. In my case, beyond the concrete justifications given for particular policies in my cases, it is useful to lay out alternative generic logics of legitimation that might be expected to manifest in my cases and international relations writ-large. Surveying IR, and simplifying, there are at least 3 other generic logics

of legitimation that frequently feature in IR scholarship: logic of appropriateness, utility maximisation, and securitization. Because each should be immediately familiar to IR scholars (and social scientists), I will only emphasize that the first two are inherently individualistic,[94] meanwhile securitization has no necessary relationship to relative position in social hierarchy.[95] Proceeding inductively, the analyst should investigate how the grammar of status – and the logic of status competition it embodies – contest, supplement, or interact with other modes of legitimation at play in case in question. Indeed, as Jackson (2010, p.170) notes, when using an ideal type as a baseline, it is not necessarily the manifestation of the ideal but the divergences from it that generate insight.

Emotional Register

To reduce status competition to its logic alone may lead the analyst to overlook the emotions that animate status competition in practice, and risk conjuring away the means through which invoking the grammar generates rhetorical power. Fortunately, a burgeoning body of work investigates the role that emotions play in international politics.[96] However to avoid overstepping my discursive methodology, it is necessary to specify the object of analysis as "emotion discourse" (Koschut, 2018a; 2018b). Here, discourse analysis does not involve trying to infer emotions of the author or speaker from texts, but recognises that discourses always embody an "emotional register", which may underpin or undermine a particular discursive performance (See: Adler-Nissen, Anderson, & Hansen, 2019, p.76; p.80). While the pathos generated by "name and shame" discourses is straightforward to apprehend, even a dry cost-benefit analysis has an emotional register that helps it function. Indeed, a cost-benefit analysis' credibility and rhetorical power relies upon sanitising the text of explicit emotional content. Akin to how using "zero-degree writing" to give the illusion of objectivity *is* political (Barthes,1967), minimizing explicit emotional content from a text *is* an emotional register in

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[94] What is crucial to note is that it is that both are individualist: whether an actor follows the norm or not can be ascertained without reference to whether others do likewise (see Sending, 2002, on the individualism of Logic of Appropriateness). To be sure, others may disagree about the interpretation of the norm and whether the action lives up to it, and this will likely affect whether the society within which the actor exists treat the actor as a norm follower or not. However, in the ideal, it is only the relationship between the actor's action and the norm that determines whether it obtains. Meanwhile, regarding utility maximisation (absolute gains) the goal is to improve upon their prior situation in some way. Here the actor justifies an action by making an internal comparison to the previous situation or hypothetical alternatives (Onuf, 1989, p.267).
[95] Relative position in power hierarchy has no necessary relationship to the logic of securitization. One can securitize things that clearly lack anything to do with relative position in a social hierarchy of power. In contrast, whenever one proposes competing for relative position in social hierarchy, it always embodies the logic of status competition. Neo-Realism from this perspective, provides a historically important discursive resource for why states should securitize their position in military power hierarchies (see conclusion).
[96] See: Crawford 2000; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Fierke 2013; Hall 2012.

itself. Remaining sensitive to the emotional register serves two purposes for the study of status competition: methodological and analytical.

Empirically, the logic of status competition is commonly associated with an emotional register of pride, shame, joy, humiliation.[97] Language in this emotional register can serve a basic methodological purpose for flagging up the *potential* existence of status being wielded to (de)legitimate a particular course of action. However, unlike the units of the grammar, no single emotional register can be logically tied to status competition.[98] Emotion laden discourses may prompt urgent "calls for 'something to be done', but leave the specificity of the 'doing' undecided" (Adler-Nissen, et al. 2020, p.77).[99] For instance, the public shame expressed at the death rate in the concentration camps during the Boer War prompted calls 1) end the war, 2) end use of camps and also 3) measures to improve the conditions in camps. The government undertook only latter and rejected the former. Indeed, this vagueness of the policy implications of emotion discourse implies that the status analyst must remain sensitive to what the expression of emotions (or lack thereof) *does*, in *conjunction* with the grammar of status competition.

Indeed, invoking pride alone need not imply status competition, but invoking this emotional register together with a grammatical unit of status competition may imply that pride and shame were theorized to constitute the stakes that made the game worth playing. For example, expressing anger and umbrage that such a small adversary as the Boer could have the "audacity" to send an ultimatum to Britain, Marquess of Granby demanded military action against the Boer by arguing that "no Government with one atom of self-respect (…) could by any possibility have accepted [the ultimatum]. (…)There must be no juggling with the fact that there can only be one paramount Power in South Africa, and that that Power must be Great Britain." [100] Indeed, Lord Granby's speech calling for war with the Boer offers an apt example of how emotion discourse— in this case, pride–can co-constitute the value of a status competition, and thus help legitimate a particular course of action (and delegitimate inaction). Methodologically, we need not confirm that Lord Granby experienced these emotions

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[97] This is an observation based upon both my research, and other status research that tie analysis of status with inner-feelings: e.g. humiliation, anxiety, anger, pride etc.
[98] Although it is worth noting that Koschut's "four ways of communicating emotions in discourse" echo my grammar of status of status competition: "emotion terms, connotations, metaphors, as well as comparisons and analogies (Koschut, 2018, p.284).
[99] The authors were referring specifically to the "bundles" of emotions produced by images, but in the context of their discussion, I read it to be a general feature of expressions of emotion in discourse.
[100] HL Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc5-7

personally to study how this type of representation helped constitute value of the competition (see also Alder-Nissen, et al. 2020, p.80). Ultimately, all invocations of the grammar of status will be performed in some kind of emotional register, however the specifics of *how* the emotion discourse informed legitimation is a matter for empirical analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter has spelled out the ontological assumptions that underpin my approach to assessing how the logic of international status competition informs government policy. In particular, I elaborated how status competition can be seen as a mode of *legitimation* (rather than motivation) and how this logic of status competition becomes identifiable and influential in discourse via its grammar. Therefore, rather than treating international status hierarchies as the cumulative beliefs by a multitude of international Others, my approach directs us to investigate the *representations* of international status hierarchies as they inform political practice in discrete local contexts. While humbling status theories' grand pretensions, this switch allows me to ground the dissertation in empirically observable phenomenon (discourse) and avoids the need to make bold assumptions about *international* inter-subjectivity nor attempt to infer and disentangle motivations. Ultimately, I argue this ontological shift enables systematic empirical inquiry into how theories of international status are instantiated in domestic politics and to investigate their role in legitimating particular policies.

Moreover, by differentiating between the ideal of status competition, and how its logic can become visible in discourse, I have set the stage to investigate how status competition diverges from the ideal when it emerges in practice. Indeed, for reasons that I theorized in the introduction, my central theoretical gambit is that although the *logic* of status competition is at play in the international relations, states and their citizens often lack inter-subjective agreement about the rules of the game. Thus, although governments may frequently act "as if" the state is involved in a status competition—mobilizing the grammar of status to legitimate their activities—I expect that political parties and citizens would often disagree about the rules of international hierarchies they compete within. Therefore, I consider it fruitful to investigate whether and how domestic theories of the rules of international status hierarchies are contested and change during the process of competing—unlike those in the Olympics—and how any such changes and contestation affect the legitimation of policies.

These expectations—that representations of international status hierarchies may be implicated in legitimation of national policies, and that the rules of those status hierarchies are unstable— imply two methodological procedures. One resembles the general status MO, reviewing the evidence of the case and determining *whether* the logic of status competition was employed, and whether it significantly affected the outcome of the policy (timing, shape, size). However, my theoretical concern with how the rules the of the game came to be, or change, also implies close analysis of the *process* of policy legitimation and whether and how the rules of the status hierarchy changed during the process of competition. It is important to note the limited methodological function that the grammar of status competition plays: it allowed me to locate the logic of status competition at play in legitimation, but the substantive content of that competition and how it changed in the process had to be investigated by close inductive analysis. The specifics of how I conducted these analyses—case and text selection- and its limitations is the topic of the next section/chapter.

Chapter III

Studying Status via Discourse:
Cases, Texts and Interpretative Procedures

This chapter explains, justifies, critiques and defends my method: what I did, why I did it, and how these choices affect the epistemological basis of my conclusions.[101] While I am not going to launch a full blown defence of interpretivism here, a few notes justifying my overall approach are necessary. Following Jackson (2010, p. 22), I share a pluralist definition of scientific research: "systematic production of empirical factual knowledge about political social arrangements". Different *systems* of knowledge production, implies that different principles and practices animate "good research". Crucially, interpretative scholarship, like mine, does *not* share the same tests of validity as neo-positivist methods (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2014). For instance, interpretivists do not "test" a formal hypothesis against "reality".[102] In my case, my approach fits best what Jackson calls "analyticism" in which an ideal type (In this case, my rule-governed status competition) provides the framework for producing an explicitly non-representational case-specific narrative (Jackson, 2010, p.152). It is not just allowed, but desired that through the process of investigation, the research departs from expectations and new concepts and factors necessarily are needed to make sense of the case (Yanow &Schwartz-Shea 2014).[103] Instead of seeking generalizable or falsifiable hypotheses, the claims made should be judged by its "pragmatic consequences for ordering the facts of the world": whether they reveal useful insights into the puzzle under investigation (Ibid, p. 115). Usefulness however, depends on having applied the framework proficiently and convincing the reader so. As Dunne suggests, for discourse analysis the "goal as a researcher [is] to

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[101] I have chosen to eschew the passive voice because I do not want feign detachment from the social world I study and create a false illusion of a "view from nowhere".

[102] Not least because the notion of testing a hypothesis presupposes a mind-independent world, which interpretivists reject. For analysts using ideal types the idea of "testing" a deliberately "one-sided exaggeration" (Weber, 1978, p.) against the world is especially nonsensical: per definition the ideal would not prove to be an accurate representation of reality. See Jackson 2010 chapters 1, 2 and 5 for an extended explanation. Also see, Yanow & Schwartz-Shea (2014).

[103] Instead of formal hypotheses, interpretivists take a more flexible approach: they "begin their work with what might be called informed "hunches" or puzzles or a sense of tension between expectations and prior observations, grounded in the research literature and, not atypically, in some prior knowledge of the study setting." (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2014, p. xvi)

provide an argument about why my interpretation is valid, so that I can convince others that mine is one of the best interpretations out there." (2008, p. 92). Although interpretivist scholarship does not share the *same* procedure of knowledge production as neo-positivists, interpretivist scholarship does demands systematic application of "logic and argumentation" (Yanov and Schwarz-Shea, 2014a, p. xvi.), and that the research process is transparent such that the reader has faith in its "trustworthiness"(Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. 31).[104]

To be clear then, anything certainly does not go. The standards of interpretivist scholarship demand that a reader be a) convinced of the internal logic and coherence of my arguments on the page, b) the *usefulness* and insight they offer and c) the proficiency and trustworthiness of the research process. I aim to account for A and B via the rest of the dissertation. However, to facilitate C (a pre-requisite to A and B), the following sections discuss my research process in the most transparent terms permitted by space constraints. Trustworthiness in this context refers to:

> the many steps that researchers take throughout the research process to ensure that their efforts are self-consciously deliberate, transparent, and ethical—that the researchers are, so to speak, enacting a classically "scientific attitude" of systematicity while simultaneously, in the spirit of doubt… allowing the potential revisability of their research results. (Schwartz—Shea, 2014b, p.131)

Thus, the following section justifies my selection of cases, theoretically and methodologically; I will then explain and reflect upon my procedure for gathering, mapping, and analysing the texts. The following section discusses epistemic limitations of my approach, while also anticipating, countering but also creating a space for potential criticism. I will also provide a list of my primary sources and how they can be accessed. I conclude by reflecting upon how my position *vis a vis* my subject matter will likely have informed both my work and interpretations. By laying my biases on the table like this, I hope to give the reader the best opportunity possible to adjudicate how they have prejudiced my analyses.

The Functions of the Cases

What is this a case of? Is a deceptively difficult question that all research must answer. However, as most good methodological guides make clear, any given empirical phenomenon can sustain multiple answers depending upon the theoretical purposes it serves (Lund, 2014;

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[104] Throughout this chapter I will use interpretivist methodological terminology (e.g. transferability, "trustworthiness", "transparency", "triangulation") in order to avoid the epistemological baggage – built in presuppositions – of neopositivist methodological criteria (see: Schwartz-Shea, 2015)

see also George & Bennet 2005 introduction). My cases perform two interconnected but distinct purposes, each can stand alone as an empirical analysis that speaks to a distinct theoretical puzzle in international relations. However, together they serve a larger collective methodological and theoretical purpose: Norwegian education reform, US arms control treaty negotiation, and Britain's war with the Boer, constitute deliberately different cases that seek to illustrate the broad usefulness and transferability of my theoretical framework.

First, each case individually seeks to make a discrete theoretical contribution to IR. Indeed, the SALT case addresses the "longest-standing, intractable, and important puzzle in the scholarly study of nuclear strategy." (Kroenig, 2018, p.57): why the US and USSR raced to several times the number of nuclear weapons required to make the rubble bounce, even after a second strike capability was assured.[105] It might be tempting to frame this as a case of "status competition and arm racing", however it is more accurate to say this chapter is a case of international status concerns hindering arms control and/or better yet: how international treaty negotiations can become constituted as status competitions and hindered as a result. Meanwhile, the Boer War chapter speaks to what I call "Mercer's puzzle": why states would seek international status when the international rewards appear so ephemeral. By paying attention to domestic discourse, my framework proffers an explanation that is occluded by structural status theories: the domestically produced rewards of seemingly international status competition. Finally, my PISA chapter speaks to the general puzzle of how lacking formal authority – and even sticks and carrots – international institutions can still influence sovereign states. This chapter can thus be read as a case of how global governance can function under "anarchy": exploring how status concerns can be manipulated by international institutions.

Second, *collectively* the cases seek to show how the logic of 'international' status competition has been used to (de)legitimate particular courses of action by governments. This addresses the general puzzle animating status research of how does status inform the policy of ostensibly rationalized bureaucracies, and how can we know it. Moreover, addressing IR status scholarship directly, each case highlights how the rules of international status hierarchies are less stable than otherwise assumed, and how actors have more agency to construct "hierarchies of their own making" than prior status research has allowed. As such

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[105] Although security matters are sometimes treated as a hard case for status (Pu & Schweller, 2014, p.143; Gilady, 2018, p. 29), status research in the last 10 years has documented extensively how status concerns have led to wars, informed arms acquisitions, and fuelled arms races.

they are all cases of how particular theories of international status hierarchies influence domestic political processes. Taken together, these cases seek to showcase my framework's potential utility to provide new insights into very different sorts of empirical phenomena. Indeed, I have deliberately selected seemingly very different cases—to be clear, not with the intention of comparing to explain similar outcomes[106]—but because the very *different* substance of the cases provides confidence that my framework has the analytical potential to make sense of other cases too (See: Jackson, 2010,p.154-155). Thus, I chose cases that vary enormously in terms of historical context, size of country, and the substantive policy areas: From a 19th century colonial war, to series of 21st century education reforms in a social democracy. Yet, while the empirical context varies dramatically, I used a common framework and methodology: I mapped discursive manifestations of the grammar of status, traced divergences from the ideal of status competition, and investigated whether/how these processes informed outcomes. Assuming my analysis is compelling, I hope to suggest that my framework – using ideal typification of status competition in conjunction with the grammar of status – has a broader applicability than just those investigated here. Indeed, rather than generalizability and external validity, interpretivist scholars aim for "transferability" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p.142). Here the goal is to provide sufficient explanation and description such that other researchers can assess whether the framework is transferable to another setting.

However, as Iver Neumann put it: "It is not enough to reflect on what we do (that is, on why we study this or that slice of world politics) and why we do it. We must also pay attention to what that which we do, *does*" (Neumann, 1999, p.36; see also Alejandro, 2018, p. 192-196). In particular, it has become widely acknowledged that IR, and thus IR scholars, suffer from implicit Eurocentric assumptions that warrant scrutiny for both analytical and ethical reasons (Hobson, 2012; Alejandro, 2018). Indeed, early in my research process, I noted a *tendency* for status theories to be predominantly used to explain 19th-20th century European, or contemporary non-western rising-powers' behaviour.[107] Given that status concerns are often treated as an irrational pathology, this pattern resembles an orientalist narrative whereby "the West" has rationalized while the "non-west" (still) let their passions dictate their politics (see Said 1979) . Thus, while it may seem paradoxical, selecting three "Western" cases to

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[106] This should not be confused with the "most different" comparative (and positivist) method.

[107] I am not going to cite examples because it is the overall pattern rather any particular scholarship that reflects a tacit eurocentricism. It is also true that there are several pieces that go against the rule, e.g. de Carvalho and Neumann's (2015) edited volume about Norway's status seeking.

illustrate my framework, I am consciously seeking to avoid reproducing this Eurocentric pattern of case selection. Indeed, one political-ethical goal of my grammar of status is to provide scholars and citizens with a means to identify theories of status when they are mobilized, especially in contexts where explicitly using status as a rationale is frowned upon (i.e "western" countries).[108]

<div align="center">Scope of the Grammar</div>

Although ideal types are not intended to be generalized in the sense of generating law like predictions, they are intended to delineate the empirically *possible*. Indeed, a powerful ideal type should have a "scope and relevance" that "supersede a particular situation or instance" (Balzacq, 2015, p. 105). To understand how my framework might apply elsewhere we should briefly recount how it was formed. Ideal types are "inductively from the 'extensive study of relevant materials' (Nicholas Timasheff, 1957, p. 178 cited in Balzacq 2015,p.105). The scope of these "relevant materials" should therefore give an indication to the scope of the possible applications of my ideal type. In my dissertation, this involved extensive study of my cases presented here, but also a close reading of the extant status literature, and via the close practical involvement required to write several (nine) article-length research-papers where I analysed status dynamics, using different status theories, different methods, and in very different contexts.[109] Given the scope of "relevant materials", I hazard that my grammar of status framework should be potentially applicable to international relations insofar as a country has a population that represents themselves as a collective situated among similar collectives. Thus, if a population begins to understand themselves as part of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991), moving through time and space, so would the grammar of status become "empirically possible".

However, narrowing down, the types of activity and policy issue that can become constituted as a status competition (via the grammar of status), are also historically conditioned: it requires both the social capability to conceive of criteria by which to make a comparison, and the technical capacity to do so (Beaumont, 2017a, p.7). For instance, it would be virtually impossible for people in the 18th century to conceive of a status competition in gender

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[108] Though not related to eurocentrism, the other ethical-political goal of my research is to encourage citizens to recognise and relativize theories of international status in domestic politics as a choice, one that that citizens can and often should contest.

[109] From the BRICS (Beaumont & Røren, 2020; Røren & Beaumont 2019) to Brexit (Beaumont 2017c); from Nagalim's quest for statehood (Beaumont, & Røren 2019) to Norway's response to PISA (Beaumont, 2017d). I have used include a modified version of (large N) status discrepancy, semi-structured interviews, the soft positivism of SIT, and discourse and narrative analysis.

equality.[110] Indeed, it is only the invention of gender equality as an analytical category that has made it possible for states to compete for international status in gender equality (see Towns, 2010). Finally, my grammar of status framework seems likely to be most useful in places and policy domains where governments are under significant pressure to legitimate their actions to the domestic population, and more likely to provide interesting insights where the nature of the international status hierarchy is contested.

If these scope conditions appear hopelessly vast, then it is worth recalling that they are considerably narrower than evolutionary-psychological theories that posit status motivation as a universal driver of human behavior. Ultimately, the extent to which my approach has broader usefulness will only be discovered should others seek to apply it.[111]

Episode Construction & Text Selection

Indeed, while the grammar of status framework helps identify logic of status competition in discourse, as chapters I and II explained, I do not expect the ideal of status competition to be met. Instead, I use the ideal type as a conceptual baseline to model "some of the relevant features of the object or process under investigation' (Jackson, 2010, p 146-7), and thus provide "a conceptual baseline in terms of which actual outcomes can be comprehended". In particular, I expected that the rules governing the status competitions instantiated in discourse would prove far less fixed than in the ideal "rule governed" competition for position described in chapter 3.[112] Thus, besides identifying whether the logic of status was at play, the grammar of status operates as a heuristic to *map and trace* the representations of the rules of status competitions as they *potentially* change across time, and/or diverge from the ideal in other ways.[113] In this regard, my grammar of status shares more than a familial resemblance to discourse analysts that use the self/other theory of identity formation to map how identity

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[110] A historical-institutionalist take on the emergence of the possibility of status competition would be productive avenue of future inquiry enabled by my ideal type, but not carried out here.

[111] For instance, securitization theory has been fruitfully applied to an ever expanding range of cases. Note though, that securitization is never tested or falsified. It can only be shown to be more or less useful in casting light upon the processes by which threats become threats. Each case added does not accumulate to a law, rather it merely adds to our faith that securitization is a useful analytical tool.

[112] Although I present it here as if this was my initial expectation, it is more accurate to say that I expected the representations of the status competition to be more unstable than the ideal, for that instability to be consequential. It was only about half-way through analysing my final case that I realised that "rules" best described what was so often proving contested and unstable in my cases.

[113] In this regard, my grammar of status shares more than a familial resemblance to discourse analysts that use the self/other theory of identity formation in order to map how identity constructions have changed across time and how they make possible particular practices (e.g Hanson, 2006).

constructions have changed across time and how they make possible particular practices while precluding others (e.g Hanson, 2006; Neumann, 1999; 1997). Part of this *reading strategy* involved paying heed to alternative explanations (see below). Specifically, mapping other patterns of representation related to and justifications for the policy. Crucially, this allowed me to remain open and flexible to assess what other logics of legitimacy were at play, as well as any "incidental factors" that may have affected the outcome (Jackson, 2010, p.170).

While each case is deliberately different in terms of substance, each case involves a similar methodology: studying the public legitimation of policy processes in a particular discursive context. In order to ascertain what mattered for legitimation at various points in these processes and sift through the noise, it required mining the archives of newspapers, policy documents, parliamentary records, government speeches (see table 1.). Moreover, my theoretical expectation was that not only would international hierarchies would be implicated in the legitimation process, but that the "rules" of the international hierarchy would emerge/evolve/change and perhaps solidify rather than remain relatively stable. Therefore, it required that I analyse not only a snapshot act of legitimation of a particular policy, but a longer *process* of legitimation.[114] The following section documents the reasoning behind the steps I took in each case to delimit the cases, select texts, and construct the analytical narrative.

Table 1

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[114] To reiterate, I would expect – or at least not be surprised by – movement *within* the hierarchy to which my objects of analysis refer. Like a cyclist overtaking her competitor this is absolutely normal. Instead, I am interested in how the rules of the game; what counts as valuable – so determining winners, losers, and rising and falling – to change in ways consequential to the outcome

Document type	Date	Search Criteria	Via
Chapter VI			
Official Archives Pertaining to SALT I & Salt II	1970-1980	SALT I & II minutes of meetings & memorandum deemed significant by Office of Historian[115]	Available here: https://history.state.gov/
Archives pertaining to general Foreign Policy of United States & Relations with Soviet Union	1970-1979		Available here: https://history.state.gov/
New York Times Articles pertaining to SALT I & II	Selected Periods[116]	Search "strategic arms limitation"	Available here: /www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/
Foreign Affairs Articles Pertaining to SALT I & II	1970-1981	All articles coded "Arms Control"	Available here: www.foreignaffairs.com/ issues/archive
Chapter V			
Government Education Policy Documents	2000-2019	Browsing Government Education Archive	Online government archive of government policy documents and reports: Regjeringen.no
Academic articles and books related to PISA	No specific dates	Various search terms using PISA plus [education words] +[Norge/Norway]	Google Scholar and Google
Newspaper Articles Pertaining to PISA	2000-2019 / 2004-2006	Articles in *VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* referring to "PISA" / "Kunnskapsløftet"	ATEKST – (Online archive of Norwegian Newspapers from 1945-present) Via: www.nmbu.no/om/biblioteket/
Official PISA Reports & data from 2001-2019	Browsing of the PISA data and reports	Norwegian results in comparison with the OECD average and other countries	Available here: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/
Chapter IV			
Parliamentary Records, Hansard	Key Debates 1899-1902[117]	Searching "Boer" and "South Africa"	Available here: https://hansard.parliament.uk
The Times Archives	Selected Periods 1899-1902	Searching "Boer" "South Africa"	Available here: www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/
Contemporary literature, e.g. histories, reports, pamphlets, academic writings	1899-1902	Via references in secondary literature and primary sources	Mostly online, but sometimes the physical books.

[115] It is important to note that this included sources pertaining to Kissinger's "backchannel" with Dobrynin.

[116] The reporting of the major summits, and the Congressional debate post-signing.

[117] In particular, the Hansard debates between 17-20th October 1899; 30 January -7th February, and on the 17 June 1901, 14 March 1902; 2-5 June 1902.

Chapter IV: Rational Illusions

The first empirical chapter investigates how various theories of international hierarchy and competition were mobilized to (de)legitimate the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and the government's undertaking of it. The process that led to me selecting this case was formative to my whole approach. My interest in the Boer stemmed directly from Jonathon Mercer's (2017) well-received article in *International Security*, where he argued that status seeking is prone to be futile because rivals have strong incentives to discount rival's achievements. He used the Boer War to illustrate his argument. The article was formative for my work because it illustrated and accentuated in just one article several common shortcomings with contemporary status research. To understand my methodology in this dissertation is to understand what I hold is wrong with Mercer's approach.

Three main[118] theoretical and theoretical-methodological moves by Mercer inspired this dissertation. First, Mercer ignores the value for a government of pleasing their citizens, which underpins his claim that gains from status are a psychological-illusion. Second, he claims divergence between domestic actors understanding of status can be accounted for by "feelings" rather than analysis. He ignores the political incentives that the politicians faced to put either a positive or negative spin on the war and instead attempts to infer feelings of pride or shame from words (Mercer, 2017, p154-156). He does not consider that alternative discourses may allow for alternative interpretations (reasonable people can disagree on many things, especially status). Third, Mercer treats a three-year war as a single event rather than a process: he tests hypothesis on primary data with little regard to when during the war the person in question was speaking (p.154–155).[119] In contrast, my approach uses the grammar of status framework to investigate how the status value of the war was re-theorized and contested during the war and how understanding these processes can provide an alternative explanation for those "illusions" Mercer deemed irrational

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[118] Other problems that are less salient to my dissertation but nonetheless important include Mercer 1) drawing an unduly sharp distinction between prestige and security that is not supported by the realist thinkers he draws upon 2) naïve reading of the historical sources whereby he does not consider that political leaders have instrumental reasons to present an optimistic picture of their groups status, rather than this optimism being a function of their feelings as he portends.

[119] For instance, he compares a speech in November 1900 by the Prime Minister expressing pride at victory in the conventional war (which ended in Sep 1899) with quotes from opponents expressing shame at the counter-insurgency tactics of the latter 18 months of the war. As chapter IV will illustrate, treating the whole war as one single event gives a misleading impression of how status concerns informed the legitimacy of both the war and the government

To analyse how theories of international status affected the legitimation of the war, and study the meaning of the war as process unfolding within domestic discourse, I divided the war into episodes.[120] Here, I mirrored the conventional approach of historians studying the Boer War, by dividing the war into three: (1) the run-up to the war's onset and its legitimation; (2) the legitimation of conventional war from September 1899- September 1900 where the government had to legitimate sending reinforcements; and (3) the insurgency-guerrilla war that lasted for the next 18 months until May 1902, whereby the government had to defend its use of concentration camps. Although it is conventional, my empirical inquiries also indicated that analytically distinct practices of legitimation were at play in these episodes. Therefore, I reasoned that dividing the war in this way would offer a useful analytical device for illuminating how the rules of the status competition changed during the process of war.

Following Hansen's (2006, p. 53-55) model of foreign policy discourse analysis, I focused on the government and opposition discourses. This involved analysing speeches, government debates, and newspaper articles: texts where the war was legitimated and/or delegitimized by those close to the levers of power. For practical reasons I had to limit the primary material to what I inductively determined were key periods of legitimation. I did this by triangulating secondary reading with the online Hansard (Parliamentary records) tool that allowed me to check for the frequency of debates about the War in parliament (using the search term "Boer", and "South Africa"). I then read the debate in Hansard together with the reporting of it in *The Times* newspaper. I reasoned that this would offer a good window into the mainstream establishment discourse *(*see table 1 for the list of primary sources*)*. I also cross referenced my interpretation with and secondary readings, which also provided me with further primary sources. This approach is not perfect (more texts would always be better), but it worked to the extent that the politics of the war became comprehensible in terms of the patterns of representation and legitimation. To be clear on the limitations of this approach. It can provide a window into whether and how theories of international status were employed in *British* political discourse and contributed (de)legitimation of the war and government. It cannot provide any insight into the "real" status implications of the war internationally: whether or not international collective beliefs changed as a result. Moreover, my approach can only shed light on what was used to legitimate the war to the public. I do not doubt that some involved

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[120] I use episode here deliberately to indicate analytically separable but interlinked periods that can facilitate intra case comparison.

were motivated by investment interests or that broader geopolitical motivations were important for others, however this would only become salient to my analysis insofar as they were used to justify the war to the public. Final, conducting an analysis of elite discourse has the consequence of reproducing the elite's marginalization of subaltern voices (see Betrand, 2018; Hansen, 2000). In particular, by focusing on the mainstream British discourse around Boer War, my analysis occludes from view the role and suffering of black South Africans during the war. To attempt to mitigate this silencing effect but without undermining my research design, I raise black South African's hidden role in war in the context section and footnotes, and provide references to research that foregrounds it.[121]

Chapter V: Organising & Resisting Status Competition

This chapter analyses how the OECD's PISA education rankings have influenced Norwegian education policy from 2001-2019. This involved tracing the way that PISA has been used and contested within Norwegian politics across two decades. I assess whether and how PISA had enabled the education policy to become framed in terms of international status, as well as the extent to which a *process* of status competition emerged.[122] Norway underwent what education researchers call a PISA shock: when a country expresses alarm that their score on the ranking is lower than expected. This had come to my attention in 2016, when Norway was ruminating on its most recent round of results. Beginning my PhD (about international status), I was keen to discover whether it might be better termed a status shock and the extent to which Norway could be said to be continuously compet*ing* in PISA. Although I was later to change my mind, my initial theoretical purpose was to investigate whether IOs could manipulate status concerns for the public good (contra conventional wisdom that understands status competition as a pathology)

I thus investigated a relatively long period where different parties were in office. Indeed, looking beyond the initial "PISA shock" allowed me to ascertain whether PISA's account of the international education hierarchy was merely used by one party, or whether its theory of international education status crossed the political divide. Tracing how it was used by both

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[121] In this way I strive to legitimate and encourage this research. In another context, Ann Towns (2019) has suggested this approach to incorporating feminist theories into research when gender cannot be made central.
[122] It is useful to clarify that the contestation involved rejecting the legitimacy of PISA for use in domestic education policy decisions. It did not (yet) involve questioning the rules of PISA at an international level in the manner that SIT theorists characterise as "social creativity".

the Conservative governments (2001-2005; 2013-present) and the left-coalition government (2005-2013), allowed me to investigate this possibility. Indeed, studying this long period was crucial for exploring status in a processual, open-ended fashion: investigating what insight can be gained by assessing several rounds of "status competition" and whether PISA retained its ability to legitimate policy change. As it transpired, this would enable me to discover and posit that the wider status literature should pay greater heed to reflexive processes and the *longue durée* of status competition: how interpretations of earlier rounds of competition feed back into the discourse and can potentially undermine the game. To gain further analytical traction on the question of whether PISA was crucial to legitimating the reforms in question, I also compared the PISA period with the pre-PISA period. In particular, I needed to investigate and show that the reforms undertaken in the name of PISA – using the grammar of status competition – would have been difficult to legitimate otherwise. This comparison would also help probe the plausibility (Eckstein, 1979) of my broader theoretical point: that new international rankings in general enable, organise and thus facilitate status competition in a wider range of activities than would be possible otherwise.

The main texts I used to analyse the processes of legitimation included government policy documents and newspaper articles covering the education reforms, as well as secondary sources that discussed the "PISA shock" in Norway and elsewhere. Again, I wanted to focus on government legitimation to the public. Therefore, I analysed the government documents pertaining to the reforms and the mainstream press reports of the reforms and the PISA education debate. To do this I searched the government database and an online Norwegian archive for sources (Atekst) with the word "PISA" as well as "Kunnskapsløftet", the name given to the raft of education reforms undertaken in PISA's wake (see table 1.).[123] The newspapers I selected were the three most read newspapers in Norway (*VG*, *Dagbladet*, and *Aftenposten*). The first two represent tabloids, while the latter represents a more serious centrist newspaper that covers opinions from the mainstream left and right. Nonetheless, these sources provided me with what I consider an ample window into the debate that ensued following each round of the PISA results: the discursive context that the government policy reforms both inspired and responded to. Moreover, the texts made tractable the emerging opposition – among some of the smaller parties – to using PISA as a basis for education policy making. Indeed, as well as functioning as primary sources, the newspapers articles also served as a pointer towards how non-government parties' policy towards PISA shifted (this was not

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[123] This has a double meaning: "knowledge promise" and "knowledge elevation".

available by searching the government database). Finally, the secondary sources I used to triangulate my analysis also become primary sources through the process of conducting research. Indeed, as I would realise, academia and academics played an important role in both legitimating PISA and contesting its value. The implication for further research of including academics in the analysis of "international" status competitions will be reflected upon in the conclusion.

Chapter VI: Symmetry over Strategy

This chapter investigates how various theories of international status informed the US negotiating position during the negotiation of the SALT treaties. The process of legitimation of these positions involved studying a different level of analysis (legitimation within the government bureaucracy) and thus involved a different procedure than the other cases. I will thus elaborate in a little more depth the method and justification. While Chapters IV and V trace how the respective governments (de)legitimated particular policies to the domestic public, chapter VI traces how SALT positions were (de)legitimated at the level of the top level bureaucracy (legitimation to the domestic audience provides the omnipresent but delayed backing track). One objection could be that the top level bureaucracy was not "public" and therefore paying heed to patterns of legitimation does not work in the same manner. This would take the term "public" too literally and narrowly. Methodologically, the size of the audience and the number of people party to the discursive context need not matter. The process of legitimation operates when a person needs to justify their action to one or more others lest those others inhibit the action or punish it. As noted above, reasons are social in that they must refer to some logic or rule that exists quite apart—intersubjective---from the individual person providing the reason.[124] The top level discussions around SALT embody this requirement: although few in number, the civilian and military participants were all expected to proffer their preferred position and legitimate to it to the group by way of logic and evidence. Moreover, the outcome of these discussions directly led to the policy position that the US took with the Soviets. While the President had the final say,[125] in the context of SALT the President's hands were tied to the extent that bureaucratic support (especially from the military) would prove crucial for persuading Congress to ratify the treaty. Thus, although

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[124] Thus, legitimation, even in contexts with a small audience—is never subjective. See Jackson (2006) for an extended discussion of the intersubjective nature of legitimation.
[125] Schisms often developed between the bureaucracies and the personnel involved. For instance, the military representatives tended to promote more hard-line positions.

SALT meetings were kept "secret" from the general public (until they were de-classified a decade or so ago), these top level meetings do contain public legitimation of policy positions to a small but important audience of top level civilian and military staff.

However, as the analysis shows, the requirement for congressional and public approval was seldom far from discussion at these meetings. Although SALT ostensibly involved the *highest* politics, the US's SALT negotiation position evolved quite explicitly through reference to what would "sell" to the domestic audience and to a lesser extent the international audiences. It is useful to highlight the methodological advantage focusing on legitimation offers; contra trying to grasp "real" motivations or by referring to some kind of "objective" international structure. Indeed, imagine with a new and wondrous methodological invention, we could go back in time and find out how the domestic audience, the US's allies, and members of the non-aligned movement, would all have reacted had the US agreed to a SALT treaty allowing the US to have 900 ICBMs and the Soviet Union 1000 ICBMs. Then imagine, we discover with 100% certainly that these foreign and domestic audiences would have only shrugged their shoulders. Would this be valuable to explaining why the SALT II negotiations were so difficult? At best, it would provide grounds to blame the protagonists, but offer little purchase on explaining their actions. Similarly, if we discovered that a Secretary of State had been bribed by the defence industry to hinder SALT II, would that make it any less important *how* he managed to insist upon hawkish positions? Rather like my interest in becoming a professional football player, it does not matter how strongly an actor might wish to do something, if the discursive resources are not available, that motivation is moot.

My choice of texts in the SALT chapter were a function of my analytical requirements and pragmatic limitations.[126] Analytically, I needed the texts which embodied legitimations of the US's various negotiation positions. Here I relied upon the judgment of the editors of the Office of the Historian (OH). Their method for deciding what texts to include in their volume explains their mandate to ensure that "the published record should omit no facts that were of major importance in reaching a decision; and nothing should be omitted for the purposes of concealing a defect in policy" (Office of Historian, 2013, p. III). In an ideal world it would

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[126] I will not dwell on the practical limitations because they are intuitive and largely generic: time and money are scarce and reading everything is impossible. Thus, I did not go to the archives physically but relied upon the Office of the Historian. However, as I argue below, I strongly suspect that for my purposes going to the archive myself would not have altered my analysis in a substantive way. I would also add, following Ward, (2019b), that academia is supposed to be collegial activity: unless we have good reason to doubt that the historians' selection of the texts (given one's purpose), it is not clear why duplicating their work would be valuable.

have been more trustworthy to ascertain for myself what was significant for explaining SALT, especially given that my theoretical concern with status and legitimation might not be "seen" with a historian's scientific ontology.[127] However, several reasons provide confidence that the texts analysed were sufficient and that the texts omitted would not significantly undermine the thesis.

Most importantly, the nature of the SALT decision making processes combined with the substance of the OH texts, lead me to have confidence that nothing crucial was omitted. Both SALT I and SALT II involved an iterative series of meetings prior to the US formalising its negotiation position (of which there were several in each round). This means that it is possible to see how the meetings' discussions were manifested in the policy positions eventually taken. If the discussions related poorly to the position taken then this would indicate that either a) the meetings had little bearing on the negotiation position, or b) the editor had excluded crucial evidence. However, across both SALT I and II all the negotiations contained within the archives correspond to the policy positions taken. Second, this problem is more severe for the analyst seeking to access motivations rather than legitimation. This approach needs to go beyond legitimation in context, and look for potentially external or even hidden factors— whether personal, economic, bureaucratic—that operated outside the reasons given. In contrast, my approach requires analysis of what was adequate in the discrete discursive context to legitimate particular positions, with a particular attention to how representations of international status were implicated (or not).

In order to triangulate, I also read and analysed the broader discursive context – both bureaucratic and the national discourse. The former was to get an idea of how SALT was situated and discussed as part of the US's broader foreign policy. Here, I again relied upon the documents selected by the Office of Historian. While little of this background features in my analysis, understanding how SALT related to the policy context provided a potential check upon my analysis and helped generate a meta-understanding of SALT's place in each administrations broader foreign policy agenda. To get a window into the broader discursive context at a national level I selectively drew upon contemporary academic security sources and the *New York Times* at key points during the negotiations (e.g. signings, ratification, and summits). I also relied upon secondary literature and historical accounts of the national

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[127] A scientific ontology are those concepts with which scholars use to conceptualise their object of analysis: realists conceive of the world in terms of states and distribution of power, while others may prefer norms and culture (see Jackson 2010)

politics around arms control. To be sure, it would have been preferable to go deeper and broader into the national discourse. However, the chapter investigates top-level discursive *legitimation* within bureaucratic contexts, therefore, strictly speaking, the domestic audience's real response to SALT only mattered insofar as how it was represented within these bureaucratic meetings and whether those representations informed the legitimation of a given negotiating position. As such, there is little reason to believe that a deeper analysis of the national discourse around SALT would substantially alter my analysis or conclusions.

Reading Strategies and Limitations

Moving from tracing patterns of continuity and change in the textual material to constructing an "analytical narrative" is a big step, one too often hidden. It is necessary to flag some potential weaknesses in these procedures and how I addressed them: missing texts and misreading. Trustworthiness and faith in the process is tricky to establish but being transparent about one's procedure helps. Firstly, it is worth clarifying a common misconception regarding discourses: they are not intended "to capture the whole of actuality, but instead to help us bring some analytical order to our experiences" and illuminate relations of the social world that would otherwise remain obscured by pure description (Jackson 2010, p 154). In the same way that neo-positivists "fillet a meat mountain" of data, so must the discourse analyst not only a) interpret what is often an overwhelming mass of "data" but b) decide what evidence is significant and sufficient to account for the outcome and c) decide what is the best way to present that evidence. In practice, steps b and c cannot involve detailing every nuance of a discourse, and therefore necessarily involves (perhaps sinisterly or cynically), *silencing* what is deemed incidental to answering of the research questions. Similar to how we must trust the neo-positivist has not "p-hacked" their way to a significant correlation, omitted crucial variables, or all manner of other ways one can manipulate statistics backstage, so discourse analysis depends to a considerable degree upon trust in the researcher. Concerns about malpractice can never be entirely assuaged, however it can be mitigated by openness about my procedures that can build trust but also facilitate critique.

First of all, the main criteria for deciding what was significant for understanding an outcome involved asking the counter-factual question: Was a pattern of representations significant for the legitimation of the policy taking place? Could one imagine it taking place in the way it did without this representational practice? What other logics were in play that could have been important? To answer these questions required careful analysis of meanings as they

were used in practice: I could not for instance count words and infer their significance to the outcome. Indeed, interpreting discourse should not be confused with content analysis: brute frequency is not necessarily a sign of significance. Indeed, all the cases involved debates around the topic in question that occurred with great frequency and heat in the textual material but were ultimately only incidental to the legitimation of the policy. For instance, in the case of how PISA shaped Norwegian school policy, it prompted a great deal of debate about the cause of Norway's poor performance in PISA. While the left and the right proffered different solutions to the problem of Norway's lowly position in the ranking, at least in the first decade, both sides accepted it as a reason to reform. Similarly, during the Boer war there was a great deal of public rumination about the British struggles in the early stages of the war: who was to blame—government strategy, equipment, manpower? However, these debates concerned practical discussions that did not question whether Britain should persist, but rather how to ensure Britain triumphed. The legitimacy of continuing to fight was taken for granted in this debate. Analogously, the US negotiation team undertook lengthy technical discussions about how to ensure there were no loopholes in any SALT agreement and that definitions did not allow one side an unfair advantage. This slowed down the negotiations, however, the difficulty involved in the technical discussions were a produced by the prior framing of the negotiations as a status competition. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of what I left out; but hopefully it provides a useful window into my exclusionary practices that might pre-emptively tackle criticism, but also open the door for constructive criticism.

I should also justify the validity of my exemplars in the construction of my analytical narrative. Crucially, I did not select these representations because they were very different from other representations; quite the opposite: they were selected precisely because they were good examples of *regularities* in the discourse. In all cases in which I use a quote to illustrate a representation, several others reflecting similar sentiments/logic could have been used; the criteria of selection here become aesthetic and rhetorical: how to illuminate the point best using the fewest words. This should be contrasted with how an analyst might strive to get at the real motivations of a policy maker. Here, the task might involve downplaying the public pronunciations as mere deceptions that played to the crowds, and (quite rightly given their goal) privileging diary entry or a private letter (Ringmar, 1996 p.41-42). In contrast, by my methodology, what works to please "the crowds" and was adequate to legitimate is privileged over the secret motivation. The advantage here is that little of the quotes I use will come as a particular surprise to anyone familiar with the cases, the novelty and insight stems

(hopefully) from my theoretical lens—the grammar of status—that helps us see it in a new light, ideally in the manner of gestalt switch.

However, as Neumann (2008) suggests, pulling off a good discourse analysis relies heavily on the researcher. Therefore, what is probably a much bigger problem than the chances of missing texts is the possibility that I have miss-read the texts, missed important representations and patterns, and generally conducted a less than convincing discourse analysis. While some of these potential problems will become apparent in the analysis if they are present, I can help the reader apprehend dubious interpretations by being open about how my social-identities and relationship to my research objects may have affected my analysis. Indeed, as Doty (2004, p. 390) contends scholars should "undertake a continual interrogation of [their] own identities" and "any body of thought, perspective, approach, or critical attitude that uses the rhetoric of social construction and takes this notion seriously must include oneself in the equation or admit to a deceit." Of particular salience here are my political orientations and specific normative stance towards some of the issues I am studying.[128] First, I became opposed to PISA during the research process and engaged in the public debate (Beaumont 2019b). As a check upon whether my reading of the discourse was "fair", I ran the chapter past a friend who is on the other-side of the political spectrum, and was actively working for the party that administrated the PISA shock.[129] While he had some quibbles,[130] overall he agreed with my interpretation.[131] Second, I have conducted research and training on behalf of organisations campaigning for the abolishment of nuclear weapons.[132] At a minimum, this informed my case selection; I had considerable prior knowledge of the Cold War arms race and nuclear scholarship in general. However, recognising the danger of "anti-nuclearist" bias, I took special care to ensure I presented a fair reading of pro-nuclear scholars (e.g. Waltz, Jervis, Glaser) and I specifically reached out to Charles Glaser to check my

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[128] See also my reflections upon eurocentrism (p.76-77). To be clear, this is not an exhaustive discussion of either my identities or my attempts to reflect upon and mitigate bias. Instead, it is those which I consider the most salient to include given my space limitations.

[129] I have also ran this text past several other politically engaged Norwegians, though they were all from the left-side, and thus likely to suffer similar bias to me on this issue.

[130] He thought I could have emphasized that the reforms undertaken in the name of PISA were good policies on their own terms. I did not incorporate this advice into my analysis because this sort of normative evaluation of the policies is beyond the scope of my analysis.

[131] Running my analysis past someone who was involved at the time, and also on the opposing political side, serves a similar methodological purpose to doing "informant feedback" (see: Shwartz-Shea, 2015, p.135)

[132] I wrote several policy papers for the International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI) on their [Anti]Nuclear Weapons Project (2013-2014) and I trained "young leaders" for the International Campaign for the Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

rendering of his argument.[133] Ultimately, despite my best efforts, it is unlikely that I can fully apprehend how my prior-socialization may have affected my research (see Alejandro, 2018, p.203-204). Therefore, beyond aiding transparency and trustworthiness, these reflections also aim to provide the reader with the best possible chance to join the dots where my attempts at reflexivity may have failed.

Conclusion

According to Dvaro Yanow (2015, p.5), self-conscious reflexivity is the "hallmark" of good interpretivist science. This necessitates the constant questioning of their methodological choices, pre-suppositions, and interpretations, throughout the research process. This chapter has attempted to give a window into that reflexive process with the goal of ensuring trustworthiness but also to facilitate critique. My discussion of cases, texts and my identities aimed to serve these purposes. Yet as Yanow (2009) argues, the interpretivist scholar should proceed with "passionate humility", ready to recognise that our analysis might be wrong. Indeed, I hope my dissertation will demonstrate that I have managed to generate compelling findings despite my various bias, but it would be hubristic, and self-defeating—given my ontology and analytical approach—to claim that my dissertation's arguments are definitive (Dunne, 2008, p 92.). However, the proof in research—as with cooking—is always in the pudding, which is coming up next.

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[133] To his credit, Charles Glaser—who I have no professional or personal relationship with— got back to me within 48 hours to say that at first blush he did not have a problem with the paragraphs and or the 2 by 2 matrix in question. I also reached out to Ronald Krebs to check the plausibility of my idea early in the process. Though this was to less to do with mitigating bias than to assess whether the case was worth embarking upon. He was similarly prompt and generous in his response.

Chapter IV

Rational Illusions: Britain and the Boer War

Even supposing that a war of this kind were in fact a war between two cultures, the value of the victor would still be a very relative one and could certainly not justify choruses of victory or acts of self-glorification. For one would have to know what the defeated culture had been worth: perhaps it was worth very little: in which case the victory of the victorious culture, even if attended by the most magnificent success in arms, would constitute no invitation to ecstatic triumphs.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations (1997)

Introduction

"War, huh? What is it good for?!", Asked Edwin Star in song half a century ago. His question simultaneously signals disgust at the horrific loss of life and futility of war. At the same time, his rhetorical question expresses the paradigmatic puzzle for scholars' studying the political economy of war (e.g. Fearon, 1995). Star's answer, "absolutely nothing at all" reflects popular wisdom but does not satisfy scholars who deduce that war must be good for something or someone. Yet, so-called "rationalist" approaches have also foundered upon Star's question (Fearon, 1994; Kirshner, 2000); many a war seems neither to improve security nor enrich the winner. It is within this context, that status research has appeared well-equipped to address this puzzle. Indeed, for several scholars, one can deduce status from the very lack of material rationalist explanations. For instance, Deborah Larson and Andrei Shevchenko (2019, p15) – pioneers of status research in IR – suggests that when substantial economic and security costs are incurred pursuing a policy in which prosperity or stability could be achieved more effectively another way, it is a tell-tale sign of status driving the policy. In a similar vein, Lilach Gilady (2018) argues that prestige policies by design require conspicuous waste that sacrifices societal welfare. It is easy to see how this logic of explanation—when the outcome looks materially irrational, status seems likely to be involved—would offer a plausible explanation for ostensibly irrational conflicts.[134]

There is a hitch, however. As I noted in the introduction, prior research has by now documented how states pursue policies—including war waging—that appear motivated by status, but scholars have fared less well showing either how increased status was forthcoming nor tangible gains from status-seeking.[135] As Jonathon Mercer has recently argued, even on its own terms, status-seeking is a futile endeavour because other states face incentives to discount to performance of rivals, and thus preserve their own status. What gains statesmen think they make by chasing status, Mercer alleges are in fact "psychological illusions", based upon "feelings" rather than "analysis" (2017, p.47). Thus. rather than arguing status is wasteful by definition, Mercer (2017, p. 168) claim is bolder: seeking status is irrational on its own terms because it is pointless to "chase what you cannot catch". Lacking recognition

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[134] Lebow (2010b,p.254) alludes to this method of determining status as a motive for war when he suggests his method partly involved reasoning "backwards from behavior to motives, seeking to discover the motives with which the behavior was inconsistent or consistent."

[135] Renshon (2016; 2017) has claimed international society has systematically rewarded war-wagers across time with greater recognition. However, Steven Ward (2020) has demonstrated that Renshon's statistical methods and the resultant findings do not stand up to scrutiny.

and/or deference for one's feats, status seeking dissolves into "vanity". He illustrates by documenting how the British government portrayed its victory in the Second Boer War (1899-1902) as worthy of acclaim and a boon to its international status, even as international actors – both rivals and allies – remained unimpressed. Mercer (2017, p.168) describes his findings are "more than a provocation" to status research, and contends that skepticism is required of status arguments that do not "explain or document how actors evaluate" their international status.

It is this intra-status debate into which this chapter steps. As I noted in the introduction, Mercer is quite correct to admonish prior status research for paying insufficient attention to how states assess their international status in practice. However, need it follow that if a status-seeking-policy elicits little international approval then claims to status dissolve into "little more than vanity"? Showcasing the value of paying attention to the domestic theories of international status, this chapter argues no, and uses Mercer's own case to draw the opposite conclusion: even if the *international* status gains from the war were indeed an illusion, these domestic "illusions" helped to legitimate an otherwise mediocre government and generate expressions of joy and pride among its citizens. Further, Mercer contends that the belief that the war boosted Britain's status stemmed from "feelings" rather than analysis. Against this, using my grammar of status framework, I show how via the *process* of re-presenting the war as it unfolded, the government and the press developed a new theory of the war's status value; one that contradicted their own earlier depiction. Indeed, although the war was frequently constructed as a status competition, British mainstream discourse diverged from my ideal type in a crucial way: unlike the Olympics, the *rules* by which comparisons were made and status assigned were contested and revised as the war unfolded. Indeed, I show how the government and press *re*-theorized the status value of war and how this re-theorization pre-dated the celebrations at victory. Tracing this process, allows the chapter to invert Mercer's claim: rather than pride informing the pro-war analyses of Britain's status, this new theory of the status competition made expressions of pride possible. These insights illuminate how governments (and domestic actors) possess a hitherto under-acknowledged agency to re-theorize international status hierarchy for domestic consumption. This provides a plausible explanation for why and how states compete for "status", even when international rewards are ephemeral. Rather than a *psychological* "illusion" – as Mercer would have it—that governments will eventually learn to ignore, the illusion of status would be better treated as sociological construction, governments actively seek to protect and maintain.

At the same time, opponents of the war developed rival theories of how the war would impact Britain's status. Drawing on the standards of civilization discourse, they argued – and simultaneously theorized – that Britain's "methods of barbarism" negated any glory from victory. In the latter stages of the war, these critics had considerable success in undermining the popularity of the war and the legitimacy of the government, the chapter highlights the advantages of taking a discursive approach to status. Both the pro-war side and the "Pro-Boers" developed theories of Britain's status that legitimated opposite policy conclusions (prosecute the war; end it early). Put differently, a concern for Britain's status could legitimate opposite conclusions about Britain's war policy; only by focusing on how international hierarchies were invoked, contested, and adapted in practice can we ascertain and how and why status affected the policy process.[136] Finally, status research has hitherto been gender and race blind – and not in a good way (Beaumont & Røren, 2018, p.19). Another key advantage of studying status as a discursive practice – rather than as a distinct motivation— is that it allows the chapter to illuminate how status dynamics can interact with the prevailing normative structures (e.g. race and gender hierarchies) and how this can help explain *why* particular representations of international status hierarchies resonate.

This chapter will now proceed by first elaborating the theoretical and empirical context of the Boer War and how the conventional theories of status leave several puzzles unresolved, before proceeding to use my grammar of status framework for analysing three inter-linked but analytically distinct "episodes" of the war.

Britain, Great Power Status and The Boer War

Britain's "New Imperial policy" of the late 19th century and especially the second Boer War (1899-1902) would seem well explained by a standard status model. As J.A. Hobson[137] (1902) highlighted at the time and many have argued since, the economic (and demographic) arguments supporting new imperialism were specious. In short, trade did not "follow the flag", quite the opposite: Britain's trade increased more quickly with foreign countries than

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[136] It should be noted that Hobson (1965)[1902] famously argued that vested capitalist interests were at the root of Imperialism and uses the Boer War as an example. However, he suggests that investor interests were a secret motive and that concerns about national prestige and honour were used to pursue these ends. As such, he does not contradict the argument I will make here, which is concerned with how status dynamics played out in the public domain, domestically and internationally.

[137] It is important to highlight that Hobson book contains anti-Semitic passages, where he implies that the financiers he blames for encouraging the war were Jewish. See Allet (1987) for an extended examination of Hobson's anti-Semitism.

its new colonies, while its colonies tended to increase their trade quicker with foreign countries than Britain. As Hobson (1902, p.38-39) laments, trade with the new colonies "forms an utterly insignificant part of our national income, while the expenses connected directly and indirectly with the acquisition, administration and defence of these possessions must swallow an immeasurably larger sum."[138] Moreover, if little was gained by the state from these new colonies, acquiring them came at significant cost. In short, scrambling for Africa was a waste of British tax-payers' money.[139]

Few examples illuminate economic and human folly of British Imperialism better than the Boer War. In a war lasting less than three years, Britain and its colonies sent 400,000 thousand men, spent more than £200 million and suffered at least 22,000 casualties (Pakenham, 1979). The costs of the war dwarfed other recent imperial wars: the Zulu The Ashanti War of 1873–4 cost only £900,000; the Zulu War of 1879 £1 million, while a decade of the Maori Wars had come to just £3 million (Porter, 2000, p. 635). Even the Crimean War with Russia had barely exceeded £68 million (Ibid) The Boer War also saw 25,000 of the Boers killed on the battlefield, but most troublingly, at least 27, 927 Boer civilians and 14,154 native South Africans died in concentration camps set up by Britain during the last 18 months of the war (Roberts, 1991, p. 358) The long-term accounting looks no better. This bred a nationalist movement which never reconciled themselves to British rule. Meanwhile, a Liberal government counting several "Pro-Boer" MP's among its cabinet, repealed what remained of the Conservatives repressive policies and granted the Afrikaner colonies self-government under the British Crown in 1907 (Ellis, 1998, p.65). Thus, less than a decade after Britain had sent hundreds of thousands of men to fight in a bloody, costly, and brutal war to assert dominance over their South African colonies, in May 31 1910, The Union of South Africa was born and became led by the same Boer leaders Britain had spent so much blood and treasure fighting.

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[138] Although Hobson wrote in 1902, his economic explanation/critique of the war and economic imperialism retains considerable following among a significant minority of historians. Hobson, and later, his followers, would argue that puzzle can be explained by vested interests co-opting the state for private rather than public gain: private financiers and gold speculators pushed Britain led to the new imperialism. Yet, despite the Boer war providing the prime example, historians have found scant evidence of gold magnates or financial interests encouraging the war (e.g.Van Helton 1982, p.411) Some neo-marxists analysis refer to indirect economic pressures. This might be so, but at the level of discourse (rather than motivation) my analysis can state with considerable certainty that the government did not use financial interests to *legitimate* the war; instead, allusions of such vested were used to by its opponents to *delegitimise* the war. For a detailed review of Hobson's many critics see Stokes (1969).
[139] See for instance: Davis and Huttenback (1982)

Indeed, the Boer War looks like an open-and-shut case of a status motivated policy leading a country economically and strategically irrational policies inimical to the public good. Acquiring an empire was what "Great Powers" did, and their international status was judged by the size of that Empire (Naylor, 2018, p. 99-100; Barnhart, 2016, p. 386). As Barnhart (2016) has compellingly argued, the "scramble for Africa" ensued among great powers "in an effort to assert their state's great power status (…) in spite of their expectations of high associated costs and heightened strategic vulnerability". It is in this context, that it seems extant status theories offer a straightforward explanation: Britain as the leading Imperial Power annexed the Transvaal at great cost, in order to buttress its great power status. To be sure, some would posit that other motivations played a role – Hobson's thesis resembles what we now call a military industrial complex that profited from imperial expansion—but even he only claims this was a *secret* motivation that was pursued *by* promoting a "jingoism" in the press that prayed on patriotism, pride and prestige (Hobson, 2005: chapter III) If one were content to hold merely hold the "two tail ends of the causal chains" (Ringmar, 1996. p.35) together, we could stop here and strike the Boer War up as a particularly egregious example of Great power wasting resources through its status-seeking via imperial conquest.

However, the conventional story leaves behind too many puzzles to be satisfactory. As Porter (1990, p.54) points out with regards to the Boer War, "it is essential to beware reading history backwards (…) from the scale, nature, costs and consequences of the war, to its origins and the intentions of imperial policy-makers". While the ruling Conservative party and most of the general public supported the empire, leading members of the government doubted whether the public would support annexing the Transvaal.[140] Indeed, the Viceroy of South Africa, Alfred Milner, who is considered the architect of the war, spent several months explicitly preparing the groundwork in public opinion and concocting a crisis that would avoid making Britain look like the aggressor (Pakenham, 1979). If imperial expansion was such a popular notion that one could spend £200 million and tens of thousands of lives on a war, we would not expect legitimating it to take so much labour. Moreover, although Britain ended up entangled in a long and costly war, in the run up to the war, few expected a war, and when it broke out, conventional wisdom was that it would be "over by Christmas".[141]

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[140] See Surridge, (1998, p.15-57) for an extended discussion of the government debates that took place behind the scenes. It is worth noting that Prime Minister Salisbury was among those sceptical of military operations against the Boer unless public opinion was sure to favour it (Surridge, 1998, p.47).

[141] Krebs (2004, p.32) attributes these words to General Roberts, who led the British army during the first period of the war. However, the sentiment of a quick and easy war was widespread (Pakenham, 1979; Farwell, 1979). For instance, Arthur Balfour, the Leader of the House had closed his speech in a Parliament debate at the onset hostilities by suggesting that "having with us [Britain] the conscience of the Empire and the material

Following Porter, we must avoid reading history backwards – assuming the price of the war, was the price Britain would pay for prestige – and instead inquire into the crucial processes that made the huge economic and human costs possible.

Second, although at its onset most of the government, press, and public supported the war, few believed it would boost Britain's prestige, only preserve it (see below). Support was present, but it was scarcely enthusiastic and faced a significant minority of mainstream critics (see below). This presents a puzzle of sorts, in that just 9 months later, Brits were dancing in the streets with joy following the relief of Mafeking in May 1900, while the government and press soon began boasting about how the victories in the war could not help but impress the world. Finally, during the latter stages of the war, the public mood shifted considerably and little enthusiasm or celebration greeted its victorious conclusion. This was the point at which Britain officially won the war and gained a colony, thus simplistically we might expect some jubilation at this new addition to the British Empire. Little was forthcoming, in fact as we shall see, the government's popularity sank in the years following victory and they lost in a landslide at the next general election. Ultimately, while status dynamics were imbricated throughout the Boer War, the standard status seeking story is inadequate.

Indeed, taking a second look through the grammar of status lens— focusing on processes of legitimation rather than motivations and outcomes – can shed light on the puzzles above and counter Mercer's provocation. To undertake this task, it is crucial disaggregate the war into phases: first, the lead up and initiation of war from 1898-1899 when the initiation legitimation took place. The second episode involves the first 9 months of fighting in which the Boers inflicted several battlefield defeats upon the Britain, before British reinforcements arrived and the tide turned. Then finally, the last 18 months of the war, when the Boers fought using guerrilla tactics, and Britain forced thousands of Boer and black South Africans into concentration camps. During each episode, the status competition framework illuminates important aspects of the discourse that can help explain some of the more puzzling facets of the case and also challenge important parts of the theoretical conventional wisdom about how status hierarchies inform foreign policy. Ultimately, the goal is to go beyond showing *that* status mattered, and highlight *how* it mattered. The main focus is on how the *domestic*

resources of Empire, surely we may look forward without undue misgiving to the result of a contest" (Hansard HC Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc60-160), likewise a Secret British Military Intelligence report reflected similar hubris: "It appears certain that, after [one] serious defeat, they [the Boer] would be too deficient in discipline and organization to make any further real stand." (quoted in Jones, 2009, p.63)

discourse represented and understood the war in terms of representations of the *international* status of Britain and by extension Brits. Thus, each section utilises the grammar of status, in order to highlight the shifting constitution of the status hierarchies that shaped the British understanding of the Boer War.

Episode 1: Honour and Hubris

> *Lord Roberts and Kitchener, General Buller and*
> *White went out to South Africa to teach the Boers*
> *how to fight.*
>
> Popular British Schoolyard Ditty

Historians have had privileged access to the official and private correspondence of the viceroy of the Cape, Sir Alfred Milner. There is now little doubt that he intentionally "worked up a crisis" with the Transvaal republic in order to force the British government to intervene on account of the "Uitlanders" living under the Boer Rule (Pakenham, 1979, p.26). By this account Milner was motivated by the goal of settling the question of British supremacy in South Africa once and for all (Pakenham, 1979).[142] This is not a controversial interpretation, the war is often referred to as "Milner's war" not just because he was the viceroy of the Cape, but because he was instrumental in bringing the war about.[143] In short, Milner was pursuing British supremacy in the region – what he saw as befitting a great power and master race[144] - as well as personal status (as the man to do it). However, what is at stake here, is *how* the war was legitimated. Milner believed – and it seems likely he was correct— that the British public nor the government would support a war with the Boer's for the sake of imperial expansion alone (see also Surridge, 1998, chapter 1). Indeed, following defeat at Majuba on the Natal Border during the First Boer War (1880-81) Britain had ceded *internal*

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[142] It should be noted that the "true" motivations of Milner are not central to the argument here. It would not change how the war was legitimated in British domestic discourse at the outset or during. Equally, whether one blames the Boer's or the Brits for the breakdown in negotiations is by the by. In short, my concern is with the whether the arguments used for legitimation worked and had effects, it is not significant whether they were just or accurate.

[143] See, Marks, (1982, p.105), Packenham, (1979), O'Brien, (1979)

[144] Milner was a self-described "Imperialist and a British Race Patriot. However, while Milner – and likely other elites— understood the Transvaal as part of a broader competition among the races, Milner clearly did not believe this would convince the British public to support the war, and indeed, as we will see this argument did not feature in the public *legitimation* for war.

independence (suzerain status) to the Boers in the Transvaal instead of sending reinforcements in order to avoid defeat. Thus, it cannot be assumed that Britain – government or public—were willing to pay any price to annex the Transvaal. While Chamberlain was also an avid imperialist, he considered winning over the public essential and did not consider imperial ambition sufficient alone (Pakenham, 1979, chapter 2 and 5, also Porter, 1996). Discussing the possiblity of military action in the run up to the war, Chamberlain worried to Milner that "the technical casus belli is a very weak one" (quoted in Surridge, 1998, p.50).

In order to legitimate intervention, the government had been presenting Britain as standing up for the rights of British citizens living under the Boers in the Transvaal. Stories were circulated in the British press about the Boers' mistreatment of "Uitlanders" (foreign nationals) and their lack of political rights, fermenting a general anti-Boer sentiment (Pakenham, 2015; Surridge, 1998). This set in motion a long period of negotiations led by Alfred Milner (Viceroy of British South Africa) and Paul Kruger (the Boer's president) which were (ostensibly) intended to hammer out an agreement about the rights of British Citizens in the Transvaal (Pakenham, 2015). In particular, the negotiations centered around the issue of the franchise for *Uitlanders* living and paying taxes in the Transvaal. The crux of the matter hinged on how many years an Uitlander must live in the Transvaal before they were granted the electoral franchise. Pakenham, has argued that Milner deliberately drew out negotiations, with the intention of "turning the screw" while appearing to act in good faith to Brits at home (Pakenham, 1979). The Boers eventually succumbed and issued ultimatum to Britain, which provided the government with a welcome pretext for war. Although the government would express outrage and dismay in parliament, as a note to from the Secretary of War (Landsdown) to the Secretary of the Colonies (Chamberlain) alludes, the ultimatum was welcomed by influential members of the cabinet: "Accept my felicitations. I don't think Kruger could have played your cards better than he has."[145] The upshot of this was that the British government could plausibly present war as defensive, and given the length of the negotiations, they had tried their best to avoid military intervention and settle matters peacefully.[146] Returning to our theme then, to what extent did status hierarchies become salient within British political discourse during the negotiations and run up to the war?

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[145] The note came from Lord Landsdown, who was the Secretary of State for War (1899). As the note suggests, Chamberlain by this point, saw war as good opportunity to put down the Boer, but had wanted to ensure that he had bipartisan support (Pakenham, 1979, chapter 4).

[146] For instance, Joseph Chamberlain, Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc266, see also the pro-war speeches in the Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc254-371

On the surface, it might appear as though a war with the Boer would serve to buttress Britain's status because it would expand Britain's empire and involve showing off Britain's martial prowess: two activities associated with great power status at the time. However, British discourse at the time does not reflect this view.[147] Instead, the representations of international status hierarchies—mobilizations of the grammar of status—explain why Britain did *not* expect the war to bolster its status position, but paradoxically why it could also be presented as necessary.

The government/pro-war discourse invoked complementary representations of its moral and military prestige, in order to legitimate going to war with the Boer. Even though the Boer were represented as unworthy opponents, within such a discourse, their lowly status also implied that Britain could not (be seen to) give in to their demands and *not* intervene. It would have constituted public humiliation for a great power—and its people—and would have undermined Britain's international position. This could scarcely be better illustrated than by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain's speech to Parliament following the ultimatum. In a long speech legitimating the decision to go to war, he argued that "the man on the street":

> knows perfectly well that we are going to war in defence of principles—the principles upon which this Empire has been founded and upon which alone it can exist. What are those principles? I do not think that anyone—however extreme a view he may take of this particular war, and however much he may condemn and criticise the policy of her Majesty's Government—will dispute what I am going to say. The first principle is this—that *if we are to maintain our position in regard to other nations*, if we are to maintain our existence as a great Power in South Africa, we are bound to show that we are both willing and able to protect British subjects everywhere when they are made to suffer from oppression and injustice…. That is the first principle. It is a principle which prevails always and everywhere, and in every difference which we may have with another country… (my emphasis)[148]

At least two aspects of Chamberlain's speech are worth emphasising. First, while a great deal of the speech regards the details of the process of negotiation that led to the war, which was the main angle of attack by sceptical members of the Liberal Party opposition, Chamberlain clearly holds that the maintaining Britain's status is a goal around which all political parties

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[147] It is also useful to clarify that economic arguments were *not* used to legitimate the war but used by critics of to delegitimize the war. This thesis was to become canonized by Hobson, and popularized by Lloyd George during the war (Rintala, 1988, p.127-129). Indeed, the notion that the Empire served as "outdoor relief for the aristocracy", and the interests of financial elites rather than the public, had long history.

[148] Joseph Chamberlain, Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc266

and citizens can align. Second, it is clear that for Chamberlain, the moral and material hierarchies were intermingled in legitimation: it was *because* Britain was a great power and had the ability to intervene, she had the moral obligation to do so, lest she forfeit her Great power status. While Chamberlain offers an ideal example, it reflects the dominant line of reasoning by other pro-war MPs on the Conservative sides.[149]

The fact that the Boers were considered so inferior in terms of resources (and to some, in terms of race and civilization), only multiplied the necessity of not giving in to the Boer's demands. Britain's self-understanding of itself as a great power relied upon representations of its military power, martial prowess, vast Empire, moral and civilizational standing, and for many, neo-Darwinian notions of being the master race (e.g. Doyle, 1900, *The Times*, January 26, 1900; see also Mercer, 2017, p. 146). Such a self-understanding of its status placed Britain atop of their international hierarchy, winning a status competition partly with rules of their own making.[150] While within mainstream discourse, Britain was placed top of the international hierarchy, it was not without rivals: Russia, France, increasingly Germany were seen as putative rivals to British leading power status.[151]

This was patently not how the Boer were represented in the British discourse. Akin to how Liverpool FC would not expect glory from defeating Doncaster at football, the Boer were considered so far beneath the British in terms of status, that it implied that there was little glory to be gained from defeating the Boers. To legitimate and engage in a status competition for glory, would require a worthy opponent. As one Irish MP put it in parliament, "it is a war without one single redeeming feature, a Giant against a Dwarf", a war which, no matter what its ending may be, will bring neither credit nor glory nor prestige to this great British Empire."[152] While the Irish Nationalists could be expected to take an anti-War line, their reading of the status stakes in the war was also reflected among some English MP's. For instance, The MP for Burnley Stanhope, reflected a common lack of enthusiasm: "We will

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[149] See for instance, Captain Sir A. Acland-Hood: Hansard, HC Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc6
[150] To be sure, other international actors may have grudgingly recognised Britain's military power especially its navy, it is doubtful – for reasons discussed in the introduction - whether the rest of international society would have recognised Britain's alleged moral or racial leadership.
[151] This is reflected in the primary sources whereby Germany, France and to slightly lesser extent Russia, were frequently referred to rivals – in both Hansard and the Times. They were also frequently used by opponents of the war when they sought to draw unfavourable comparisons to British conduct. Other countries crop up, the views of Russia and the US popped up in the *Times*, but Germany and France were the main Other in the discourse. This is broadly consistent with secondary literature, in which France and especially Germany are usually depicted as Britain's main rivals at the time.
[152] Mr. Davitt: Hansard, HC Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc60-160

succeed, but that will not make the war a justifiable one. We have a feeling—indeed I am not sure that we do not confess—that we do not expect any glory from it. The war must inevitably be an inglorious and an ignoble one."[153]

However, the way that the relative status informed the legitimation for the war is perhaps best highlighted by the umbrage expressed by more avid supporters of the war. These MPs tended to speak in the emotional register of shock and outrage at the lack of deference shown by the Boers.[154] Indeed, it is the sheer *defiance* shown by the ultimatum – and the implied lack of respect for Britain's Great power position— that ostensibly left Britain no choice.[155] As the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, argued in parliament, the Boers had "issued a defiance so audacious that I can hardly depict it adequately without using stronger words than are suited to this Assembly" therefore the need to explain the war has "been wiped away in this one great insult, which leaves to us no other course to pursue (…)"[156] He was echoed by the Lord Chancellor, who argued that "no Government with one atom of self-respect (…)could by any possibility have accepted [the ultimatum]. It is difficult to say whether the ultimatum is characterised more by audacity or by insanity"[157] Indeed, the umbrage that such a *small* adversity could dare send an ultimatum to Britain was pervasive in the Lords debate.[158] For instance, Lord Loch stated that "no one throughout this country" could read "that arrogant message" and for "a moment doubt the absolute necessity and duty of teaching the Boers… that we are determined to maintain our rightful position as the dominant power in South Africa".[159]

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[153] Hansard, HC Deb 18 October 1899 vol 77 cc181-228

[154] It is worth noting that this is consistent with Alex Yu-Ting Lin's argument (2019, p.8-9), which suggests that insubordination from small states is especially concerning for great powers because deference is expected.

[155] It is worth noting that the Boers also saw fighting the war in terms of status, though in their case as a rite of passage to enter the "state club": "Our volk throughout South Africa must be baptized with the baptism of blood and fire before they can be admitted among the great peoples of the world." (Jan Smuts, future Prime Minister of South Africa, cited in Judd and Surridge, 2013 p.9) Indeed, the Boers understanding of the need to fight for recognition, resembles Ringmar's explanation of why Sweden joined the 30-year war. Moreover, it would support Renshon's (2017) argument that "fighting for status" is endogenously encouraged by the hierarchies within international society.

[156] Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, Hansard, HL Deb 17, October, 1899, Vol 77 cc17

[157] Lord Granby, the Lord Chancellor, HL Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc6

[158] Lord Barnard was one of many that makes the size asymmetry explicit: "No nation could receive such an ultimatum as that, even from the most powerful nation in the world, without at once replying to it in a manner which could leave no doubt that it was prepared to defend the territories which were attacked" (HL Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc3-39). The emphasis on size was also echoed by the Prime Minister, and others in the Commons and Lords when referring to why Britain could not meet the ultimatum with anything but war.

[159] HL Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc3-39

Yet, *why* the ultimatum was so helpful for legitimation is worth spelling out. Indeed, although it is taken for granted within British discourse and by historians that Britain could not plausibly give in to the ultimatum, given that Britain had yet to mobilise its material advantages, it would have made good "rational" sense to play for time to prepare for war.

As the quotes indicate, the ultimatum touched a collective nerve because the Boers were of such lowly position—as the Prime Minister put it, were a "wretched little population",[160] let alone a state adversary—and as such the ultimatum was a particularly "audacious" "and "insolent" affront that could not be let to pass. The clear implication is that the Boers should know their place, and Britain has no option but to "teach them a lesson". Reviewing the entirety of the Commons and Lords debates there is *not* a single member legitimates the war in terms of a positive quest for status. Instead, most express reluctance to fight in what the Leader of the House, James Balfour, referred to in the debate "this unhappy war", but the Boer ultimatum had forced their hand, and action must be taken to *preserve* or *maintain* Britain's status.[161] For those who had welcomed war, the ultimatum was a boon to their efforts to legitimate it.[162] However, even Liberals that expressed their "protest against what has led up to the war"– and supported an amendment expressing their disapproval[163] – admitted that "the ultimatum *undoubtedly* called this country to go to war." (my emphasis)[164]

Yet, seeking to maintain Britain's status by rejecting the ultimatum was not only represented as a question of pride, but also prizes, or more precisely, the expectation of punishment should Britain not go to war. It was not only suggested that giving into the Boer's demands would have led to rivals to perceive Britain as weak (bad in itself), but that it would encourage the other colonial uprisings requiring costly interventions or perhaps even concessions. As such Joseph Chamberlain, the Minister of the Colonies put it to the Cabinet in the run up to the war, failing to intervene risked "the position of Great Britain in South Africa –and with it the estimate formed of our power and influence in our colonies and throughout the world" (cited

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[160] Quoted in Steele (2000, p. 19)

[161] Balfour used the word unhappy to describe the war three times in his speech. Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc254–361

[162] Prior to the ultimatum, Chamberlain acknowledged to Milner was that "the technical casus belli is a very weak one', which hindered preparations and resolute action." (cited in Surridge, 1998, p. 50)

[163] The amendment read: "But we humbly represent to your Majesty our strong disapproval of the conduct of the negotiations with the Government of the Transvaal which have involved us in hostilities with the two South African Republics."—Mr. Stanhope: Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc254

[164] Sir Samuel Evans, Hansard, HC Deb 18 October 1899 vol 77 cc197-198
Another self-identifying "radical" Liberal MP, Charles Dilke put it similarly; "I freely admit that the war in its immediate inception has been forced upon us in circumstances which make it impossible for us not to pick up the gauntlet thrown down," Hansard, HC Deb 17 October 1899 vol 77 cc66

in Ovendale, 1982: 41).[165] *The Times* reflects this concern with *preservation* of influence, writing in a leader, "Had we not acted as we have acted, we should have "abdicated our Imperial influence altogether" and that Britain must "see this war through to the end" until "we have *restored* British Prestige fore and aft" (*The Times*, November 6, 1899- my emphasis). The same sentiment was frequently expressed in the Commons and Lords debates about the decision to go to war (October 17-19). Given the general lack of military force Britain employed to control its colonial possessions, maintaining its position in what realists refer to as the "hierarchy of prestige" could be represented as strategically crucial.

Ultimately, in terms of public discourse, the decision to go to war against the Boer was not a question of competing *for* status, it was understood as necessary to *preserve* its status for reasons of both pride and prizes. Two points are worth emphasising here. First, by the governments own discourse, defeating the Boer should have proven straightforward; a routine exercise in imperial management. Yet, as I will elaborate shortly, Britain struggled on the battlefield to defeat its tiny foe, yet would go onto present the victory as glorious. Thus, the puzzle is not the one Mercer thinks it is – that Britain's view of the war diverged from international opinion about the war— but rather that by the governments own terms, the war was not expected to bring glory. Second, an important ontological and methodological point is worth making about how the leaders evidenced the theories of status they used to legitimate the war. What is noticeable is that the grammar of status was used to theorize a *hypothetical* outcome that could not be countenanced; *if* Britain gave into the ultimatum it would forfeit its position as a great power. Thus, legitimation of the war rested on what would end up being an *untested* theory of international status. One cannot empirically evaluate the effects of a course not taken. However, the advantage of a discursive approach to studying theories of status as a mode legitimation is that we can analyse its political effects rather than attempting to assess whether it was true or not. In the case of the Boer war, the theory that Britain would have forfeited its great power status should it have caved in to the ultimatum, was the primary and I would argue necessary representation that a) made the war possible and b) enabled bipartisan support for the war.

Episode 2: Emergent Status Competition

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[165] This concern with British influence was also expressed in Chamberlain's address to parliament, see quote above but also Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc263-266.

Everyone is splendid: soldiers are staunch, commanders cool, the fighting
magnificent. Whatever the fiasco, aplomb is unbroken Mistakes. failures,
stupidities, or other causes of disaster mysteriously vanish. Disasters are
recorded with care and pride and become transmuted into things of beauty.
Other nations attempt but never quite achieve the same self-esteem
(Fussell 1975, p.175.).

Within weeks of the onset of war, the government's confidence revealed itself to be hubris. Not only was the war not over by Christmas, but Britain was losing at Christmas. Between the 10-17th of December 1899, the British Army suffered humiliating defeats at Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso. Around 2,776 men were killed. These military defeats became known as "Black Week", which together with the disaster of Spion Kop in January 1900, revealed beyond doubt that the government and the public had severely underestimated the Boers' relative strength, organisation, and military prowess. Indeed, in what became known as the first "modern war" and a precursor to the First World War, the Boers victories highlighted the weaknesses of a sclerotic British Army, which had been hitherto hidden by fighting opponents lacking modern weaponry.[166] The Boers had not only managed to repel the British threat to their territories (the Orange Free State and the Transvaal), but they had seized several towns in Britain's Cape Colony and Natal, and laid siege to Britain's strongholds at Ladysmith, Kimberley, and the outpost of Mafeking. These defeats prompted consternation among the public, who directed their ire at the political class that were deemed to have failed to provide the generals with the adequate resources to fight the Boers. Certainly, it has been widely recognised (by contemporaries and historians) that the poor planning and personal feuding at the War Office, had left a dangerous gap between the onset of the war and the period when sufficient reinforcements would arrive (Surridge, 1998). However, the gradual arrival of massive reinforcements eventually saw Britain's asymmetrical resources overwhelm the Boers (at least on the conventional battlefield). Between February and May 1900, they relieved the besieged towns, before embarking upon a victorious march on Pretoria in June. The conventional war was over in September, when General Roberts took Komati Poort, thus effectively cutting the Boer's off from the outside

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[166] Indeed, one important outcome of the war was to bring about a comprehensive of reform of The War Office and military organisation (Porter, 2000, p.636).

world. This would prompt Roberts to declare that the war to be "practically over".[167] While thousands of Boers continued to wage a guerrilla campaign, few expected it to last long.

The events in South Africa during this episode interest us here insofar as they were represented within British discourse as evidence of Britain's status in the world and effects this had upon domestic politics. Given that it was widely expected that Britain would defeat the lowly Boer's with ease,[168] the succession of battlefield defeats immediately had ramifications within British discourse. Yet, as Mercer (2017) has highlighted, the British government claimed their triumph in the war as bound to impress international audiences, boost Britain's prestige, and thus induce additional deference. By Mercer's account international audiences were unmoved and did not show any additional willingness to defer. Yet, what Mercer misses, is that the international audiences' response is consistent with British discourse in the run up to the war: even the proponents of the war did not expect a boost in status from beating such lowly opponents; instead they had legitimated the war on the grounds that only by defeating the Boer could Britain's prestige be preserved. Thus, the puzzle is not only why Britain's depictions of the value of the war for its status differ from international audiences', but how could the governments plausibly claim that the war boosted its great power status, given its earlier representation of the Boer as a trifling opponent. Mercer's argument is that Britain based its claims to status upon emotions born from victory. Against this, I show how through the process of fighting and *re*-presenting the war, an alternative, a more favourable theory of the war's status value became plausible and salient: one that made the emotional register of pride possible.

War of Words

The Boer War caught the public's imagination like no other had hitherto (Donaldson, 2018; Morgan, 2002). John Gooch (2000, p. xix) probably gets a little too carried away with his claim it was the "*first* Media war" (my emphasis), but certainly the level of coverage and breadth of readership was unprecedented. The advent of the popular press, telegraph, and portable camera allowed domestic populations to keep abreast of the latest news from the battlefront with a new immediacy and intimacy (Badsey, 2000). Indeed, at least 58 dedicated

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[167] In a speech given to an audience in Durban (quoted in Pakenham, 1979, p.486)
[168] As Jonathon Mercer (2017, p.152) notes: "the British considered the Boers uncivilized, racially inferior, and amateur soldiers"

war reporters were employed in the field on behalf of British and international press to report the action as it unfolded (Morgan, 2002, p.2). Unsurprisingly, Britain's great power rivals followed the war with interest, especially following Black Week. The press in France, Russia, and Germany had long sided with the Boers even before the conflict, depicting Britain as an interminable bully attempting to coerce the Boers (Lowry, 2002, p.271-272).[169] Moreover, The *Times* and other newspapers frequently reported (or rather, translated) international opinion about the war from various European capitals (Krebs, 1999, p. 42).

As a result, when Britain suffered a series of unexpected early defeats, "Britain's embarrassment was international" (Williams, 2013, p. 493). For instance, "Black Week" prompted one of the *Daily Mail's* war-reporters to lament: "What shame! What bitter shame for all the camp. All ashamed for England! Not of her—never that!—but for her. Once more she was a source of laughter to her enemies." (G.W Steevans, cited in Farwell, 2009 [1976], p. 83). One war correspondent, who would write among the first contemporary histories of the war, H. W. Wilson (1900, cited in Porter, 2000, p. 638), expressed most clearly why these defeats prompted such outpourings: "The fame of the Army, the prestige of the nation, the very existence of the Empire, were in grievous peril (…) victory at best could never regain for us what we had forfeited—our reputation before the world". The shame was not merely an elite manifestation but widespread amongst the working class too (Readman, 2001). For instance, Frederick Willis, a working class man, recalled in his memoirs how he felt about the what he saw as a threat to Britain's international status: "To this day I remember the distress [it] gave me. As a citizen of the great British Empire ... I felt I could never face the world's scorn if we ceased to exist as a first-class power." (quoted in Readman, 2001: 136).In short, the expression of shame at suffering defeats at the hands of an enemy hitherto deemed to be so thoroughly inferior was reflected among the elites and everyday population alike.[170]

Immediately following "Black Week" (December10-17, 1899), the government began calling up the rest of their reserves and for volunteers to go to the front. Meanwhile, *The Times* (18 December, 1899) rallied, telling its readers "The urgency of sending further reinforcements with the least possible delay is recognized, we are sure, by the whole of the British people". While the parliamentary debate in January saw widespread recriminations about inadequate

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[169] Around 2500 men volunteered from overseas – including from Russia, Germany, Ireland, the US, and of course Holland— to fight on the Boer's side (Omissi & Thompson, 2016, p.272)

[170] Although some historians have questioned this, most notably Price (1973) claims that the working class were uninterested in the Empire or the exploits of the British army.

preparations for the war,[171] even those that had hitherto criticised the government's handling of the war admitted that Britain had to take whatever measures necessary to defeat the Boers to avoid national humiliation. Blanch, (1980, p. 217) captures this sentiment, noting that even former critics now recognised that "even if the war was wrong, it could not be lost".

Re-evaluating the Status Competition

Beyond the threat of losing territory and men, the early defeats also produced status predicament. Given how Britain had represented the Boer prior to the war's onset, how could representations of Britain's great power status be reconciled with this wave of military defeats to such a minnow? Even though Britain ultimately defeated the Boers surely the military defeats on the battlefield would have still been undeniable signs that Great Britain was not so great after all. Besides sending vast numbers of reinforcements from Britain, and the rest of the Empire, to ensure that at the very least Britain did not lose the Boer War, British discourse underwent considerable adaption that served to mitigate, insulate, and offset the threat defeats posed to the Britain's self-understanding of its status. As we shall see, rather than re-evaluating the status position of Britain, the press and government *remade* the rules of the status competition. The following section explores how was this was achieved in practice.

First of all, the process of fighting and especially suffering defeats at the hands of the Boers led to Britain re-evaluating its enemy on more favourable terms. This became a key line of defence in parliament used exculpate the government from blame for the early losses. Suddenly, the government presented their once lowly opponent as having assembled "vast military machine", armed "with the most perfect weapons ever used in warfare." [172] Meanwhile the Secretary of State for War suggested they had underrated "their value as fighting men", in particular their "tenacity and mobility".[173] While the Boers were still often "othered", it became common to emphasize the Boer's military pedigree and prowess. Writing in the immediate aftermath of Black Week the *The Times* (December 20, 1899) offers a textbook example of how the British press came to re-theorize their adversary:

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[171] See Hansard, HC Deb 30 January 1900 vol 78 cc71-156
[172] HC Deb 30 January 1900 vol 78 cc73-75
[173] HL Deb 30 January 1900 vol 78 cc41

as being born and bred to the life of the veldt, they possess inherited and acquired instincts which can be imparted to the soldier only after long and careful training in this special kind of country…. They are exceedingly stubborn and tenacious in defence, which also might have been anticipated from their national character, since they trace their descent from the stout-hearted seamen who proved our toughest naval antagonists….Highly trained tacticians-and there are many such in the Boer ranks-would, if trusted and obeyed, be able to effect much with the excellent material at their disposal.

Beyond a new appreciation of the Boer's fighting prowess, the quote also alludes to other themes reflected in the discourse of re-evaluation: the Boer "race", emphasis on the difficult terrain, and their "excellent" military capabilities. Indeed, Conan Doyle (1902)[174]—who worked as a correspondent and historian of the war—runs with both these themes more explicitly. Drawing upon the neo-Darwinian discourse of the period, he suggested – using the grammar of status – that their mix of Dutch and Huguenot heritage and several generations spent fighting "savage men" produced "one of the *most* rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen upon earth" and made them the "*most* formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain". Indeed, the Boer War took on the misleading nickname as the "white man's war".[175] The cumulative effect of these discursive moves was to constitute the Boers into the new *position* of worthy of enemy within British discourse, one that Britain could take offer glory from defeating.

British discourse during the conflict also began to emphasize the logistical difficulty of waging war on a separate continent. Recalling that to make competitive comparisons requiring a great deal of discursive labour and indeed abstraction, it should not be surprising to learn that the meaning of the Boer War in terms of status competition was ambiguous and contested. Although realist scholars have – post-hoc – coalesced around material definitions of who or who was not a great power, more historically orientated scholars highlight how there was considerable ambiguity and disagreement about which countries counted (Zala, 2017; Naylor, 2018; Neumann, 1997, 2014). Race, history, proximity to Europe, as well as type of power were to varying degrees at play during the 19th century regarding who should count as Great among the Powers.[176] In this context, Britain had some discursive leeway to construct and modify the criterion by which to assess the status value of the war with the Boers, at least to its domestic audience. Indeed, once underway, Britain began sending ever

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[174] The book I am citing is the 1902 edition, however it was first published in 1900 and according to the author, he made minimal alterations to the text with each new update.

[175] As has now been thoroughly demonstrated, this was a gross misrepresentation – see (Roberts, 1991; Krebs, 1999)– It also got the nickname "gentleman's war" (e.g. Fuller, 1937), which was both racialized and bitterly ironic given that the British would pioneer the concentration camps and undertake widespread farm burning.

[176] As Japan would find to its chagrin, the race hierarchy of the time could offset military victories in determining which countries were recognised as Great.

greater numbers of reinforcements to South Africa from Britain as well significant numbers from New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Indeed, the fact that it had successfully called upon the latent resources of its colonies was similarly represented as potent symbol of the Empire's military capacity[177] The global nature of this operation led the government to emphasize the logistical capacity required to transport hundreds of thousands of men several thousand miles across the oceans. For instance, speaking in a month following Black Week, one Conservative MP called upon his colleagues the House of Commons to:

> remember that this war is being carried on at a distance of 6,000 miles from the base, and is in that respect unprecedented in the history of the world. It is not an easy matter to send troops to fight 6,000 miles away and to keep up an adequate commissariat supply[178]

Taken together, this positive re-evaluation of their adversary and the logistical difficulty involved in waging the war, laid the discursive groundwork for the Prime Minister to later declare that victory was a "wonderful achievement". [179]

The takeaway point in terms of the theory of status competition that emerged, was that while the Boers were by no means a great power in size, the scale of the operation and their newly-recognised fighting capacities implied beating them would display a power projection capacity befitting a great power. To be sure, this drew upon extant discourses about how being a "world power" required global power projection, but at the same time, this theory of why the war should impress, de-emphasized the relative *size* of the enemy, which the government had hitherto emphasized as a reason for why the victory should have been straightforward and thus why status could not be gained but only saved. As we will discuss later, both theories co-existed in British discourse and implied quite different conclusions about the implications of victory for Britain's status.

"200 Not Out": Narrating the Competition

In addition to re-evaluating the enemy and emphasizing the power projection, the press's reporting not only allowed the country to follow the war closely, the style of the reporting

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[177] The Duke of Somerset's speech in the House of Lords offers an especially good example of this re-evaluation of the war and enemy (HL Deb 30 January 1900 vol 78 cc 6-8) See also, *The Times*, February 6, 1900

[178] HC Deb 30 January 1900 vol 78 cc150-151

[179] Prime Minister Salisbury, speaking to Liberal Unionist Association (quoted in Mercer, 2017, p153)

encouraged the country to understand the war as an important round in an international status competition. Accustomed to living vicariously through their country's exploits, the public could follow every blow via the new half-penny press (Morgan, 2002). Typically, the asymmetry between the Boers and the British remained in the background, while reports from the front zoomed in on the micro-battlefield dynamics and individual narratives of heroics (Omissi and Thompson, 2002a). As Jaffe (1995, p.93) notes, the young "gentlemen" that volunteered to be officers, saw the war "series of sporting events" whereby the conflict became an extension of the "system of sports, games and physical finesses exercises which characterised British Public schools in the nineteenth century". The press and the war correspondents followed suit.[180] Indeed, as Donaldson writing about the relationship between sport and the Boer War, "the language exchange between the sporting and military worlds that became an increasing feature of popular journalism of the period."[181] Given this reporting, it could make plausible the representation that the war was exciting and that victory could be glorious. What is crucial for our purposes here, is to highlight how sporting metaphors provided a crucial discursive mechanism by which the war became constituted as a status competition against a worthy rival.

Few better illustrations exist of how sport was used to frame the conflict as a sporting contest among rival competitors than how the siege of Mafeking was reported in the press. Zooming on the tactical predicament—the Brits were outnumbered at Mafeking---rather than the strategic balance of power, the general charged with the defence of Mafeking, Robert Baden Powell, could be presented as a plucky hero: fighting against the odds, displaying British virtues of ingenuity, good humour, and bravery in the face of adversity. Indeed, Mafeking became a central narrative in the Boer War, making Baden-Powell famous in the process. For example, in an episode that typifies how Mafeking was framed, Baden Powell released dispatch to the press relaying his response to the Boer general who had challenged his men to a cricket match:

> Sir, I beg to thank you for your letter of yesterday…. I should like nothing better –after the match in which we are at present engaged is over. But just now we are having our innings and have so far scored 200 days, not out, against the bowling of Cronje, Snijman, Botha … and we are having a very enjoyable game. I remain, yours truly R. S. S. Baden-Powell (Cited in Ferguson, 2012, p.277)

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[180] Indeed, sport had become an "essential frame of reference for society at the turn of the twentieth century"(Donaldson, 2018: 7)

[181] As Lakoff G. (1991) has illustrates, the use of sports metaphor to understand war extends beyond both Britain and the 19th century.

The Press had a "field day" with the story, "[it]was portrayed back in Britain as the war's most glorious episode (…) Indeed the press treated he siege as a kind of big imperial game, a seven-month test match between England and the Transvaal (Ferguson, 2012, p.195). Mafeking was far from the exception: besides cricket, boxing also featured, while even the government joined in (Donaldson, 2018, p.23). The practice of using sports metaphors in reporting was so widespread that it even fermented a backlash. For instance, one letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, wrote that they found repellent "the treatment of the [war] in the language of sport when the issue is the making of widows and orphans" (Donaldson, 2018, p.21).

While distasteful, the use of sporting metaphors can help explain why Britain would and could end up "behaving as though they had beaten Napoleon" rather than a defeating an opponent similar in size to a "second rate English Town".[182] I contend that by invoking, notions of "fair play", rules and constituting winners and losers, the widespread use of sports metaphors in the reporting of the war helped constitute it as a salient status competition among *rivals*. Indeed, framing the war using sports metaphors had the effect of conjuring away the power imbalance that had constituted the Boer as trifling foe, enabling the enemy to become re-evaluated as a worthy opponent. The result was that rather than mere relief from humiliation, triumphing in this "contest" could enable a new emotional register – joy and pride – meanwhile winning the war could be theorized to bestow glory upon Britain and Brits.[183] This will be illustrated shortly; beforehand we will turn to the final discursive practice that helped a new understanding of the status competition emerge within British discourse.

Mediating & Translating International Opinion

As noted, international audiences were paying close attention to the war, however if *The Times* reporting of international opinion reflected domestic media as a whole, international opinion was usually mediated with nationalist lenses.[184] Indeed, *The Times* tended to

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[182] These are the words of two contemporary critics of the war: John Merriman and Wilfred Blunt respectively (quoted in Mercer, 2017, p.155)

[183] It should be noted that many observers at the time noted the tendency to treat war like a sport and while many of them considered it healthy, following black week, some questioned it. For instance, William Elliot Cairns, a captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers published a book in 1900 in which he lamented that "active service is regarded rather as a new and most exciting kind of sport, a feeling which has been heightened by our numerous campaigns against savages, than as a deadly serious business where the stakes are the lives of men and the safety of the empire." (cited in Donaldson, 2018 ,p.17)

[184] If anything, it seems reasonable to assume the other press outlets – especially the famously jingoistic Daily Mail – would likely to have had a stronger nationalist bias than the *The Times*. Indeed, Krebs (1999, p53) has

systematically discount criticism and generally narrate the criticism in a manner that downplayed its significance. The following dispatch from *The Times*' foreign correspondent a month after Black Week showcases the key techniques of the genre (see also e.g. *The Times*, February 7, 1900, *The Times*, May 24, 1900):

> England's privileged situation, her immense, colonial conquests, fertilized by her genius for colonization, the extent of her trade, through vast civilizing influence exercised by her throughout the globe, have aroused the baneful and degrading sentiment of jealousy which rages in the souls or the nations not less than in individual hearts. This, with other motives more degrading still, is the fundamental cause of the treatment of which England is today the object (*The Times*, January 26, 1900).

It goes on to theorize that even if the "regret" is not "publicly displayed":

> It cannot, in fact, be a matter of indifference to a superior mind that the universal patrimony of modern civilization should be despoiled or one of its most considerable factors, and that such a nation as the English should suffer reverses in such surprising conditions as we have seen (*The Times*, January 26, 1900).

Ultimately, it is this "contradiction" between the outward expression of satisfaction at British defeats and what a "superior mind" capable of recognising the value of Britain's civilization, that, according to the correspondent, make listening to claims on the continent that Britain's prestige has suffered a "death blow" so "odious".

The crucial point to note here is how the dispatch enables the reader to apparently learn about the continental perspective, while at the same time being encouraged to discount it. Several aspects are worth emphasizing here, the preamble emphasising foreign envy of Britain; the assumption that regret must be felt even if it is not expressed; and the irritation with the "odious" assertion that Britain's prestige has suffered a "death blow". Assuming this pattern were widespread in how newspapers reported international views as it was in the *Times*, then it would surely offer a significant piece of the puzzle for how the dominant domestic theory of the Boer War's implications for Britain's international status could diverge from international audience's in the manner that Mercer describes (see below)

Nothing in the preceding mini-sections will strike scholars of the Boer war as controversial. While I have only provided the odd exemplary quote, in each case there were a host to choose from. The marked tendency within British discourse to re-evaluate the Boers as worthy enemies and the new emphasis on the logistical demands of the war do not diverge from any

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argued that the Times, while conservative and nationalist was far more balanced in its reporting of the concentration camps than *The Mail*.

ordinary historical account. Nor will it surprise Boer war scholars to learn that the press focused on battles, heroes and micro-narratives, and that they tended to report international opinion with scepticism. However, taken together and put into the context of status research, these practices can help explain and support a counter-intuitive thesis about how states can compete – and gain domestic political advantages – from status seeking policies even when international recognition is not forthcoming. Crucially, I will show how this status competition of Britain's own making allowed its citizens to express pride from winning. This, as I will elaborate in the following section can help solve what I call *Mercer's Puzzle:* why even if the *international* gains from seeking international status might often prove often illusionary, that "competing" for status may remain attractive to states nonetheless.

Everyday Theories of Status and Domestic Legitimation

As I noted in the introduction, Mercer (2017) highlights how Britain's great-powers rivals publicly poo-pooed the victory and did not appear to defer any more readily to Britain than before. Yet, at the same time, the government and ordinary Brits – apparently oblivious to international opinion— heralded their victory as symbolic of their great-powerdom. Ergo, argues Mercer, the Boer-War wrought only illusionary benefits and thus international status is a quixotic pursuit that rational leaders will eventually learn to forego. Yet, if we treat pleasing the domestic audience as important for legitimating a government, then we can present a compelling and more plausible alternative. Further, drawing on the analysis above, we can show how the government's preferred theory of the status implications of the war emerged through the process of re-presenting the war as it unfolded, rather than popping up upon victory. Thus, I argue it was *analysis* that generated the expressions of pride rather than the other way around.

On the first point, Mercer describes in some depth the British public's response to battlefield victory, ostensibly to highlight how it was divorced from international opinion:

> The Oxford English Dictionary added "to Mafik" to capture the euphoric, wild, "Mafeking" crowds. A British war correspondent wrote, "It is good to be an Englishman. These foreigners start too quick and vanish quicker. They are good men but we are better, and have proved so for several hundred years." Each victory led to "Mafeking" crowds, re- ported the Handsworth Herald: "Staid citizens, whose severe respectability and decorum were usually beyond question or reproach were to be seen parading the streets shouting patriotic songs with the full force of their lungs, dancing, jumping, screaming in a delirium of unrestrained joy." So great was the joy that members of Parliament sang the national anthem to Queen Victoria in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace. (Mercer, 2017, p. 153 [references removed])

Yet, this account surely begs the obvious question: what rational leader would not want to preside over a policy that led to such joy amongst their subjects that, as Mercer describes, they added a new word to their dictionary? One might object that the public celebrations and government support reflected the joy at the increased security or perhaps the economic gains victory on the battlefield wrought. However, both the secondary literature and my reading of primary sources suggests the positive valance attached to the meaning of the victories was primarily constituted by their implications for Britain's status in the world. A *Times* article illustrates the general theory of why Britain's victories were so meaningful to the British public:

> Week by week the chance grew stronger that, for the first time for a hundred years, a great British army might be forced by famine, by disease, and by the exhaustion of their ammunition to lay down their arms. The military effects of such a calamity would have been serious, but it was not the military effects the nation feared. They feared for the prestige of the flag, and to- day they are rejoicing with an exuberant gaiety they rarely display, because Sir Redvers Bullen and his gallant troops have removed that fear from their hearts" (*The Times*, March 2, 1900).

Crucially, the theory that Britain's reversal of their earlier defeats saved the "prestige of the flag" did not require confirmation by way of conclusive proof: evidence of influence upon international "collective beliefs" about Britain's status in the world. Instead, the *Times*, and as we saw, the supporters of the war, *deduce* that it must, given what they hold to be common knowledge about the impressiveness of the victories.

Beyond prompting citizens to invent a new word to describe euphoria, the Conservative party also benefited in more tangible ways from presenting and competing in their own version of the status competition. Indeed, being seen to have successfully restored and even boosted Britain's status as a great power provided immediate gains to the Conservative party. The Conservatives actively campaigned on the Boer war: 34 of the 49 campaign pamphlets that are known to be published during the 1900 election pertained to the war, while only 14 referred to domestic issues (Gailbraith, 1952) Thus, we can say at a minimum that government and its supporters actively used its war efforts policy to legitimate its reelection. The crucial function the war played for the government in seeking to get re-elected is well captured by the following excerpt from a pro-Conservative election pamphlet:

> WORKING MEN! The correspondence of Radical M.P.'s with the enemy, their speeches, actions, and votes show that alas! the party of a small England, of a shrunken England, of a

degraded England IS NOT DEAD. But KILL IT NOW by your contempt, your loathing, your manly patriotism, and your votes FOR A UNITED EMPIRE. Electors, be up and doing. Your Children Call Upon You. They will ask you hereafter how you voted in the crisis of the Empire. *Don't let your reply be "For a Small England, a Shrunken England, a Degraded England, a Submissive England." NO! To the Poll then, to the Poll to Vote for the Unionist Candidate and for GREATER BRITAIN* (cited in Galbraith, 1952)

This example illustrates how supporting the war was associated with protecting British manhood, strength, and ultimately status among nations. Indeed, it highlights how the conservative campaign explicitly argued that Britain's status in the world depended upon voting Conservative/Unionist. Salisbury's pitch to country on the eve of the election put the war front and centre arguing first and foremost, "the gravest questions" concerning the "imperial power over the territories of the two South African republics" required re-electing the Conservatives (*The Times*, September 24, 1900). The Conservative-supporting *Times'* coverage of the election also tied support for the war effort and securing Britain's status in the world, with re-electing the Conservative party into office.[185] Finally, contemporary accounts – by both Liberals and Conservatives – suggested the war had been at the very least helpful to the Conservatives and a "liability" to the Liberals (Readman, 2001, p. 127). As one Conservative MP noted, the 1900 election had given his party "a very much larger majority than we should have secured had there been no war." (Cited, in Readman, p.127). Thus, even if the boost to Britain's status was illusionary, it was a useful illusion for the government to maintain.

On Mercer's second point: did feelings drive the analysis of the war's status implications? Inspecting the evidence, Mercer himself uses, reveals how observers did *analyse*, but used diverging theories of the status. Indeed, lacking an independent adjudicator with the means to define the terms of comparison, assess and circulate an authoritative assessment of Britain's status, the government and the public had to theorize for themselves the impact of the war on Britain's status. Given the difficulty of this task (see introduction), it is hardly surprising that rival theories co-existed. Crucially, diverging interpretations need not imply they are derived only from emotions, it can instead reflect different assumptions about the nature of international status hierarchy. As Mercer (2017, p.153-155) documents: Prime Minister Salisbury assumed that the colonies' support would impress the world, the Liberal critic Hobson assumed that the brutality of the tactics would shame, while others such as the influential naval theorist, Alfred Mahan assumed beating white people (the Boers) would be

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[185] For instance, *The Times*, (September 26, 1900)

worthy of esteem. It should go without saying, that these are just different approaches to *analysis*. Deciding which facts to emphasise is not a question of empirical accuracy (between right and wrong), but a value judgement upon which reasonable people can disagree. Mercer claims these actors are going on feelings because they do not conduct direct analysis of their audience. Yet, similar to Mercer's argument that states discount the successes of their rivals in their public pronouncements, as we saw above, the press systematically discounted the words of international audiences too. Rather than go by what their rivals expressed in public, they preferred to deduce status effects from their assumptions about how international status works. Given that foreign governments have instrumental incentives to limit public praise for their rivals, this is not a wholly unreasonable approach. To be sure, the various observers – especially Mahan, the Social Darwinist— might have been working on faulty assumptions, but this is not the same as going on "feelings".

It might be tempting to suggest there is no point adjudicating between feelings and analysis. Yet if we look at the *temporal* development of the British discourse, we can see that these different theories of the status implications were not merely elicited *upon* victory, as Mercer (2017, e.g. p154) claims. Rather, as I documented above, during the process of fighting, the Boers were positively re-evaluated in Britain's discourse as worthy adversary, setting the stage for conceiving of the war as a competition that Britain could take pride from winning. This process was facilitated by the style of reporting of the battles that focused on micro-dynamics rather than strategic asymmetry, and the tendency for newspapers to insulate the domestic audience from international opinion. I would thus suggest that domestic assessments of Britain's status were not derived *from* pride at victory, but that the re-theorization that occurred during the process of the war (prior to victory), enabled leaders and Brits to express pride from victory.

Put into the broader context of status research, this analysis illustrates how the rewards from framing and treating an activity as an international status competition need not be zero sum in practice. As the Boer war highlights, contradictory discourses about a status can exist, persist, and have effects simultaneously. This is neatly illuminated by Mercer's account of the allies' apparently contradictory self-understanding of their role in the war. Mercer (2017, p. 158-160) shows how the British, New Zealanders and Canadians all *simultaneously* contended that the Boer War demonstrated their *superior* fighting prowess. In other words, akin to the world's many "above average" drivers, multiple countries could simultaneously make the same claim to superior status—in an imagined international hierarchy of fighting

prowess—and "win" according their own account of the same competition. Meanwhile, the relative insulation from one another's discourses, implied that these interpretations could endure and produce effects without the contradictions needing to be settled.

Episode 3: "Gentlemen", Guerrillas & Gender

When is a war not a war?

Campbell-Bannerman,

Leader of the Liberal Party, 14 June 1901

The satisfaction the government and citizens expressed following the battlefield victories of 1900 was relatively short-lived. Thousands of the Boers refused to surrender and instead embarked upon a guerrilla war. Initially Britain's leadership expressed confidence that the "Bitterenders" would soon realise their plight was futile and surrender to British rule. This confidence turned out to be misplaced, and Britain became embroiled in an 18-month guerrilla warfare in which the so called "civilized" norms of war were disregarded. In September 1900, Britain began systematically burning the farms of Boer families suspected of aiding the guerrillas. In December it would become official policy to force these homeless civilians into what the government would claim were "refugee camps" but would later become known as "concentration camps". Although it was not the ostensible intent of the British authorities, an estimated 27,000 died in the camps from diseases related to poor sanitation and malnutrition.

When reports of the farm burning and the conditions in the camps eventually reached the British public, it would become the new focal point which public discussion of the war centred around. The Liberal party had long been divided over the war. However, in the early stage the party's official position was to support waging the war, but nonetheless question the government's handling of the war and the negotiations that led to it.[186] As news of the farm burning and later the camps emerged, the anti-war faction of the Liberals increased both in number and voice.[187] In December 1901, the party passed a motion—the General Committee of National Liberal Federation—calling for a negotiated settlement, as well as voicing

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[186] Hansard, HC Deb 19 October 1899 vol 77 cc254-371

[187] This is reflected by the leader of the Liberal party's change in position towards the war from one of begrudging support at its outset – the ultimatum had prompted even radical Liberals to back the war—to one of outspoken opposition once the high death-rate in the camps were publicised (Pakenham, 1979, p.535) For an extended discussion of Liberal divisions see: Jacobson (1973).

confidence in their leader Campbell Bannerman, who by this time had become an outspoken critic of the governments tactics. They also passed a motion condemning the concentration camps.[188]

This tragic episode of the war is relevant to us here because it demonstrates how it was not merely winning the war *per se* that induced pride in the British population and buttressed their faith in their international status. Rather, how Britain fought – playing by the rules of the game – was also crucial. As we saw, the pro-war, government led discourse re-theorized the meaning of the war in a manner that bolstered the status of the Boer, and thus allowed Britain to represent beating them on the battlefield as major achievement worthy of pride and acclaim. However, while the terms of comparison could to some extent be remade, Britain's tactics in the latter part of the war contradicted long-standing norms about how wars should be fought: victories on the battlefield could elicit pride, but winning by targeting women and children was considered "uncivilized" and thus illegitimate. Indeed, as I will outline below, critics of these tactics argued they breached the "standards of civilization" by which Brits saw themselves as the flag bearers. Indeed, exporting "civilization" to so called "savage" and "barbarian" cultures was a (if not the) crucial normative underpinning for Britain's imperial enterprise (See Boisen, 2013, Vucetic, 2011b, p.24-26; Suzuki, 2009, p.18-20). While the government had leeway to present its actions in South Africa in a positive light – and they certainly attempted to present the concentration camps as a source of pride—when the death tolls from the camps began to emerge in the press and enter public debate in Parliament, it was increasingly difficult for the government to legitimate the tactics and the governments prosecution of the war in general.

The Concentration Camps: Women, Children, and Civilization

Britain had initiated the farm burning tactic towards the end of the conventional campaign and began using camps in Autumn 1900, ostensibly to provide for the families left destitute by these tactics. Especially in the beginning, the camps suffered from appalling sanitation and "shortages"[189] of food, which led to the camps becoming rife with illness and suffer series of lethal epidemics.[190] Given the international and national attention the war had garnered, it is

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[188] Reported in the *The Times* (December 5, 1901)

[189] Some of this shortage may have been strategic: critics of the camps claimed that the families of Boer men who were engaged in guerrilla warfare were given even worse rations than those who were not (e.g. MP Owen Humphreys Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1902 Volume 104 cc406).

[190] The inmates suffered from measles, bronchitis, pneumonia, dysentery and typhoid.

surprising it took so long – several months— before reports surfaced in the press. A letter from Louise Maxwell, Pretoria's military governor, to the *New York Herald* (16, April 1901, cited in Roberts, 1991) calling for international aid for the inmates first alerted the international and British publics to the conditions in the camps.[191] However, it was Emily Hobhouse's reports from the camps, published in a one penny pamphlet (Hobhouse, 1901), that sent shock waves through Britain and prompting backlash against her personally (Roberts, 1991). She did not hold back in her condemnation, arguing that even it was not the intent of the authorities "[t]o keep these camps going is murder to the children" (Hobhouse, 1901, p.4) Following the public outcry that met the reports, the government was forced to defend the camps in parliament and promise to address the public concern. To this end, they sent The Fawcett Commission (of six women), to investigate the conditions in the camps and provide recommendations about how to improve. Although it the commission was expected to whitewash the problems in the camps, in fact they ended up echoing most if not all of Hobhouse's concerns (Roberts, 1991,p. 265-267; Pakenham, 1979,p.546).

It is within this context that in March 1902, an amendment was tabled by the Liberals "deploring the great mortality in the concentration camps formed in the execution of the policy of clearing the country in South Africa" and to "state what further measures they intend to take for the preservation of life" inside the camps. [192] This heated debates about the camps offer an excellent window into changing discourse of the third phase of the war. Crucially, powerful criticisms (and critics) came to the fore within mainstream discourse, which successfully destabilized the government's earlier representations that the war constituted a boon for Britain's international status.

The attacks on the government's use of concentration camps rested upon two co-constitutive lines of attack. The first did not require the war to be understood in terms of status in order to generate its power: causing the deaths of innocent people was considered morally abhorrent in and of itself. In theory, this argument could have relied only on the recognition of the norm that killing innocent people is wrong, and that the act in question was a case of innocent people being killed. This was straightforward in 19th century Britain:[193] women and children were assumed a-priori to be innocent, thus the deaths concentration camps were

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[191] Having been publicly rebuked for going public and even worse, requesting aid from foreign countries, she wrote a letter defending herself in *The Times*, (July 31, 1901)
[192] Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1902 vol 104 cc421-422
[193] And today – see Charlie Carpenter (2003), on gendered discourse of NGOs and how this imperils innocent men.

difficult to present as anything other than the deaths of innocent people (see Krebs, 2004, p.62). As one Irish MP argued: "Assuming the policy of the war to be perfectly right, assuming it to be a perfectly just and necessary war, surely it does not follow that we ought to pursue a policy of extermination against children in South Africa. The worst of this method of proceeding is that the burden of it is falling not upon the men on the field, but upon the weak and innocent who are outside. Why should the children be punished?"[194]

However, in addition to the internal shame of being associated with the responsibility for the deaths in the camps, this argument was repeatedly buttressed with theories of how it would affect Britain's international status. In the words of one of the Liberal MPs that tabled the amendment calling for the government deploring the camps; it would besmirch "the reputation and the honour of the whole nation"[195] Thus, he continued, it was "the interests of the Government, and also in those higher interests of humanity, and *for the good name of this Empire*, let everything be done that is possible to bring about a better condition of things." (my emphasis). Indeed, seldom did those who spoke against of the camps not buttress their critique by raising how the camps would reflect upon Britain's status as a civilized nation. For instance, the leader of the Liberal opposition, Campbell Bannerman, who had infamously referred to the Britain's farm-burning tactics as "methods of barbarism",[196] attacked the camps on the same basis: "It is the whole system which they have to carry out that I consider, to use a word which I have already applied to it, barbarous."[197] Indeed, the standards of civilization were invoked by both sides throughout debates about the legitimacy of British tactics – especially their use of concentration camps in the final episode of the war.

The fact that it was women and children that suffered in the camps prompted particular consternation among the opposition. As Lloyd George emphasized: "We are fighting them, but we are bound to fight them according to the rules of civilised nations, and by every rule of every civilised nation it is recognised that women and children are non-combatants."[198] It was an Irish nationalist MP that expressed the civilizational argument against the camps most sharply: "conduct in South Africa in connection with these women and children is conduct which would bring shame to the cheeks of the most savage and most barbarous people

[194] Hansard, HC Deb 17 June 1901 Vol 95 cc 581
[195] Hansard, HC Deb 04 March, 1902 vol 104 cc-413
[196] He used the expression in a speech he gave at a dinner given by the National Reform union at the Holborn Restaurant (Kuitenbrouwer, 2012, p.226) He had earlier that day been had a meeting with Emily Hobhouse to discuss the situation in South Africa (Roberts, 1991, p. 242-243)
[197] Hansard, HC Deb 17 June 1901 vol 95 cc601-602
[198] Hasard, HC Deb 17 June 1901 vol 95 cc582-583

in existence". However, several British MP's s also explicitly theorized how the treatment of women and children in the camps would affect Britain's standing in the world: For instance, one MP belied a patriotic concern for Britain's standing when he argued: that the camps were "a disgrace, and if children die and women fall ill it is upon us that the responsibility lies, and upon the fair fame of this country lies the discredit"[199] The MPs here were echoing Hobhouse's report – a frequent feature of the debates in the commons over the concentration camps- which had also used the civilizational discourse to attack the use of camps.

Breaching the standards of civilization was seen as particularly damning because Britain was assumed to be not only a civilized nation, but the *leading* civilized nation. As illustrated by the *Times* correspondent quoted earlier, British discourse was saturated with glowing representations of its "privileged situation, her immense, colonial conquests, fertilized by her genius for colonization, the extent of her trade, through vast civilizing influence exercised by her throughout the globe".[200] In the house of commons debates over the legitimacy of the war, countless references are made to Britain's purported civilizing influence (both by pro and anti-war MPs). Thus, when the camps critics drew upon the standards of civilization to attack Britain, they aimed at a central basis of Britain's self-understanding of itself and its position in the world: not merely as *a* civilized country amongst many, but as the leader and standard bearer. Indeed, Byron Farwell (1979, p.353) notes, the accusation that Britain had employed "methods of barbarism", "horrified" the British public because "for the past two hundred years at least [the British] had regarded themselves as the most civilised people on earth". Thus, the rhetorical question posed by Emily Hobhouse in a public address in Southport - "where is your *boasted* civilization and humanitarianism?" (reported in *The Times*, July 4, 1901,p.10) [201] –could be expected to sting.

However, putting women and children in concentration camps was represented not only to breach the "standards of civilization", but also destabilised the value of the war as a masculine—read positive—enterprise. [202] As the election pamphlet quoted in the previous

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[199] Mr. C. P. Scott: Hansard HC Deb 17 June 1901 vol 95 cc 603-604

[200] Or as another *Times* correspondent wrote: "The world has to thank England for, having led the way in all the great achievements of three centuries in the sphere of politics, economics, and culture." (*Times*, May 26, 1902)

[201] Although reporting on the meeting, *The Times* featured it under the headline "Pro-Boer Movement". Hobhouse wrote a letter two days later admonishing *The Times* for misquoting her; she asserted she had said "their" rather than "your"

[202] I lack the space to elaborate fully here, but my research suggests there were also racial rules that defined the terms of status competition, which if broken would threaten the positive comparisons and status value of the victory. As I alluded to earlier, neo-Darwinian notions of racial competition were also implicated in the rules of the competition. Britain went to great efforts to maintain the image of the war as "White Man's war" as the Foreign Secretary Balfour had promised at the outset (Hansard, Parl. Deb, 28 July 1899 Vol 125, col. 683.)[202]

section suggested, Britain's masculinity and virility were represented as being bound up with supporting war, and Britain's war performance. Fighting was considered manly and thus positive, opposing the war on the other hand implied a "shrunken" "degraded" "submissive" England (see above). Yet, as stories of Britain's treatment of women in the camps began to surface[203] it destabilised the pro-war association with masculinity: civilized gentle*men* were supposed to protect women, not force them into filthy camps to die (Krebs, 2004). As one Irish nationalist asked in parliament: "What civilized Government ever deported women? Had it come to this, that this Empire was afraid of women?" He went on to pointedly draw an unfavourable comparison with Britain's great power rivals: "The Germans when they conquered France did not deport the women. A pretty pass you have brought the British Empire to."[204] While this counter discourse did not bring a halt to the war, it did ferment a growing opposition and ambivalence among the British population, and ultimately long-term, according to Porter (2000, p.647) "spawned disillusionment with Empire".

Forced to defend their use of concentration camps, the government and its supporters used several arguments against their critics. They suggested that the death rates were not necessarily worse than they would have been without the camps; they highlighted the improvements that they had instigated since they had been alerted to the problems; suggested the problems were an unpleasant but ultimately unavoidable consequence of war.[205] Predictably, some attempted to silence opponents by claiming that criticizing the camps would only help the Boer, undermine the war effort, and thus prolong the suffering.[206] The government was especially bullish at first. The Secretary of State for War, Brodrick, sought to blame the Boers for "taking advantage" of the British's "humanity" by pursuing a guerrilla war that used their farms as supply depots, thus turning the concentration camps into a military necessity.[207] Interestingly, the government, and specifically Chamberlain sought to

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For instance, Britain refused offers of support from the Indian Viceroy during periods when Britain was otherwise seeking a source of reinforcements, and even denied General Kitchener requests for Indian troops during the latter stages of the war (Pakenham, 2015: 215-216; Omissi, 2002). Why would a British government refuse to follow what strategically and economically made sense? After all, Britain had used troops from Canada, New Zealand and Australia. I would suggest that at least part of the answer would be that Britain did not want to destabilise the prevailing Darwinian racial hierarchy, which was represented to underpin Britain's position in the world.

[203] Crucial here was Emily Hobhouse's first hand reports from camps that were published in the Manchester Guardian between early 1901 until the end of the war. See Krebs (2004)

[204] Hansard, HC Deb 25 February 1901 Vol 89 cc1164–1165

[205] Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1902 vol 104 e.g. cc420-433

[206] Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1902 vol 104 cc 421

[207] Hansard, HC Deb 17 June 1901 vol 95 cc592-593; these sentiments were also echoed by the *Times*. For instance, *The Times*' war correspondent attempted to rebut Hobhouse's claims about the camps (*The Times*, October 19, 1901, p.11) meanwhile it also published a large number of letters to the editor questioning Hobhouse's account and accusing her of helping the Boers as well as Britain's enemies on the continent: e.g. *The*

render the concentration camps as not only legitimate but as a source of pride for Britain. In a radical, if doomed attempt to legitimate the camps, Chamberlain used the grammar of status to try to frame the size and scale of the camps as symbol of Britain's dedication to minimising the horrors of war: status as a civilized nation.[208] Claiming that the concentration camps were in fact refugee camps,

> *Now, let me say that never in the whole history of the world, so far as we know it, have there been such gigantic efforts made by any nation to minimise the horrors of war*(…)*taking it as a whole, I repeat what I said at the beginning—no more gigantic task has ever been undertaken by a nation in time of war, no more humane task has ever been so well fulfilled.*[209]

However, given the camps were required as the result of the farm burning strategy and given that the government was forced to admit that inmates of the camps were not free to leave, and it had become known that the camps were at least partly strategy of war,[210] rather than just relief, the government's attempts to legitimate and even celebrate the camps rang hollow. Indeed, while the government contested several aspects of the critics' narrative they could not escape the fact that Britain had been responsible for forcing over a hundred thousand women and children into camps, where they had been forced to admit that tens of thousands had died. Although the *Times* were on balance sympathetic to the governments line on the camps (and skeptical to their critics, especially Hobhouse), the topic of the concentration camps was a discursive terrain the government's legitimacy suffered from dwelling upon (Morgen, 2002, p11-12; Porter, 2000, p 647).

The press reported upon the guerrilla war considerably less frequently and with less enthusiasm than during the earlier phase (Morgen, 2002, p.9), meanwhile the Boers' eventual surrender did not bring about wild celebrations as previous battlefield victories had. Even when the Bitterenders finally surrendered on May 31 1902. The victory Britain might

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Times, 17, August, 1901, p.8.; The Times, March 29, 1902, p.8. Frequently, the reporting of Hobhouse was heavily gendered, suggesting that Hobhouse was overly-emotional and therefore her account could not be trusted. For instance, *The Times* depicts Hobhouse's complaints against *The Times* reporting as "an ill-considered ebullition of temper, such as ladies sometimes imprudently indulge in, which we are sure she-ill herself in cooler moments regret" (*The Times*, August 30, 1901). Although hardly balanced, *The Times* did publish (and thus report on) a great number of Hobhouse's letters, her correspondence with government, and some of her fellow critics.

[208] Although not framing it in such bold terms, the *Times* editorial line echoed Chamberlain's attempts to depict the camps as source of pride: "We do not agree with Hobhouse, and her ilk, but we offer our "hearty assent to her view that it is the duty of all right-minded persons to encourage those who are trying to alleviate the miseries of war rather than carp at those good Samaritans. Naturally we differ from her as to who the Samaritans are. She thinks they are the pro-Boer committees. We hold that they are the British Government and their servants in the refugee camps." (*The Times*, August 30, 1901, p.7)

[209] Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1902 vol 104 cc446-449

[210] Hansard, HC Deb 17 June 1901 vol 95 cc584

otherwise have enjoyed was tarnished by the means they had used to achieve it. Although the Prime Minister would attempt to put a positive gloss on the occasion, his speech nonetheless belied a widespread lack of enthusiasm when he opened his announcement by saying he "hope[d]" that [the surrender], will bring the *lamentable* state of things in South Africa to an end" (my emphasis).[211] The sour taste the war left behind was apparent in Parliament and is well illustrated by a consternation expressed when MPs were asked to vote on a motion to provide a pecuniary reward for General Kitchener for ultimately prevailing in the war.[212] While the government was not wholly unsuccessful in defending their tactics, the attacks on the camps succeeded at the very least in rendering the implications of the war for Britain's status as ambiguous and contestable in mainstream political discourse.

Indeed, regardless of the government's rhetorical gymnastics,[213] it proved difficult to square the concentration camp policy with earlier construction of the war as sporting contest in which Britain prevailed in a fair competition. Ultimately, once Britain's battles with the Boer ceased being undertaken on the battlefields, and because the rules of "the gentleman's war" were clearly being broken, it undermined the representation of the war as a "fair fight". Similar to how if your opponent castles with a queen, one cannot be said to be playing chess, so it was that once Britain began to use "methods of barbarism" so the war became difficult to present as a rule-governed competition they could take pride from winning. As Williams (2013) notes:

> [it]was one thing to celebrate the steadfastness of the defenders of Mafeking, or the battlefield heroism displayed at Paardeberg, but quite another to remain comfortable with the burning of Boer farms and the herding of Boer civilians into squalid and disease-ridden 'concentration camps'. Public enthusiasm waned, opposition grew more confident, and the newspaper press played its part in articulating a mounting reaction against the war. Few celebrated the actual victory… quite the opposite, the guerrilla war was looked upon with growing disquiet and almost outright shame.

Conclusion: Status Competitions of Our Own Making

Using the grammar of status framework, this chapter has conducted a close reading of how international hierarchies constituted the meaning of the Boer war within mainstream British

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[211] Hansard, HL Deb 02 June 1902 vol 108 cc1086
[212] Hansard, HC Deb 05 June 1902 vol 108 cc1555-85
[213] It is also worth noting that many of the officers involved (Surridge, 1997, p.582-584) as well as Milner and Chamberlain privately questioned the legitimacy of the Britain's counter-insurgency tactics (Pakenham, 1979, p. 541-542).

discourse and how these played into the (de)legitimation of the war. Episode one highlighted how bipartisan support for the war relied upon the government's (ultimately untested) theory that their great power status would be lost if they ceded to the Boer's ultimatum. The Boer's lowly status made it essential that Britain put them in their place, but at the same time the undertaking promised little glory for doing so. This informs the puzzle that animates episode two, how did the Prime Minister end up heralding the long struggle to defeat of the Boer as a "wonderful achievement"? Rather than re-evaluate Britain's own greatness in-light of its struggles, the government reappraised their adversaries during the course of the war, downplayed their relative size, and emphasized the logistical difficulties involved in fighting the war. Meanwhile, the press's coverage zoomed in upon the battlefield heroics of the war, constituting it as a "fair fight", meanwhile the *Times'* translated international opinion but encouraged its readers to discount any negative views as founded upon jealousy rather than reason. Thus, episode two documented how the government could plausibly claim beating the Boer warranted glory even when international audiences did not appear ostensibly impressed. Finally, episode 3 showed the limits of the ability to remake the hierarchy in self-serving manner; Britain's use of concentration camps ran into prevailing domestic gender and civilizational discourses, which critics wielded to delegitimise the war and destabilise the government's claim that the war was a performance befitting a great power.[214]

Taken together, the chapter has sought to demonstrate how my grammar of status heuristic – and taking processual-relational approach—can be used to produce new insights into a specific case. In so doing, I hope to have illustrated the general utility of a) conceiving of "international" status as a mode of domestic legitimation rather than motivation, and b) treating status competition as a discursive process, in which the "international" hierarchy *may* be contested and remade within domestic politics. I will now elaborate three theoretical and methodological implications of this chapter for IR status research.

Nationalist Ontologies: Seeing a Successful State

Perhaps the most crucial theoretical implication of this thesis is its illumination of the interpretative agency located in domestic discourse that can allow government to re-theorize

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[214] Rather than putting off future governments from using concentration camps in later wars against de-colonial movements during the 1950s and 1960s, Britain would instead attempt to keep their tactics hidden. See Elkins (2005), whose research into Britain's use of concentration camps against the Mau-Mau in Kenya, led to the British government admitting the existence of hitherto "lost" archives documenting the use of camps throughout the empire during de-colonialization (Anderson, 2015).

the rules of the status competition to their own advantage. Indeed, episode two illustrated *how* domestic theories of international status can develop in relative insulation from the outside work, thus mitigating the zero sum game for status, at least insofar as the government can legitimate itself to its domestic audience. This domestically produced and insulated theory enabled Brits to see winning the Boer war as an important round in an international status competition, and enable the emotional register of pride and joy. Here, the analysis above directly challenges the widespread assumption within status research that status claims require international recognition to be worthwhile. Indeed, while status scholars have been inclined to focus on the socially creative *policies* that states *do*, the above discussion implies another key way that states are able to maintain positive comparisons: via cultivating and insulating a theory for interpreting their place in the world; one that accentuates strengths and downplays weaknesses, thus facilitating positive comparisons. Indeed, much like scholars develop a necessarily partial, often conventionalized,[215] scientific ontology for theorizing and acquiring knowledge about the world (Jackson, 2010),[216] I contend that states and their citizens can cultivate *nationalist ontologies.* Like ordinary scientific ontologies, nationalist ontologies involve the slicing up and organizing social life into meaningful categories and relationships, that they use for making theorizing and acting upon the world. As we saw, Mercer contends that this is best understood as psychological illusion, however from the perspective of governments seeking to legitimate themselves, then an alternative rationale emerges. Indeed, it is not a controversial assumption that governments have strong incentives to attempt to present themselves as successful and thus legitimate. Moreover, leading an imagined community that is at once aware of "others" in the international but lacking perfect information about their "collective beliefs", a "rational" government has the opportunity to develop and insulate such favourable renderings of international hierarchies. Given that international comparisons increasingly form the basis for assessing the performance of a states and government, maintaining nationalist ontologies is better seen as a routine part of prudent statecraft, rather than vanity as Mercer claims.[217]

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[215] For instance, until the early 1980s, the statist-materialist ontology of IR was little reflected upon within the field.

[216] Jackson makes a distinction between scientific ontology – a commitment to the stuff, entities, processes, that exists and are consequential for making substantive claims about the world – and philosophical ontology, whether or not a scholar holds they can access a world independent from their minds.

[217] Beyond these sociological incentives, one can also make this argument based upon SIT: *ceterus paribus* it would expect humans would to the slicing in a manner that enables and encourages positive inter-group comparisons with other national groups. The result of society and its citizens' habitually organizing the world in this manner would be ontology of the international well-designed to allow citizen's to generate pride from identifying with their nation state and avoid shame. Ward (2017a), also uses social psychology to theorize how even leaders who do not care about international status, may instrumentally seek to satiate their citizens psychological demands for high status.

It is not only winning that counts

Theoretically, the final episodes illustrate that when a war is framed as status competition, to elicit glory from winning requires victory to be achieved according to the domestic understanding of the rules of the game. This insight fleshes out IR's prior understanding of how waging and winning a war can generate the "intrinsic" benefits commonly associated with international status. For instance, Renshon (2016) influential *International Organisation* paper and his book, *Fighting for Status*, emphasizes that it is victory in war that changes international audience's perceptions. Renshon lacks any consideration of *how* that victory is achieved: The implication is that victory boosts status regardless of whether it is achieved by breaching international or domestic society's norms. This tendency to focus on the outcome seems less a theoretical claim than a tacit assumption born of methodological necessity. For those seeking to test a theory in a neopostivist manner, it requires binary variable that are clear and simple to measure: demarking dependent variables in terms of binary: won or lost. Whether a war is fought in the "right way" is too messy and contextual to lend itself to the sort of general explanations these approaches strive for. However, as the Boer case shows, generating domestic status dividends may not be straightforward and require imaginative discursive labour. While episode two suggested states –may have more leeway to make their own rules than previously envisioned – this agency is not infinite. Indeed, as the war entered its final stage the tactics that they used to win – putting the enemies' women and children in concentration camps – allowed the war's opponents to draw upon gendered norms of civilized conduct to delegitimate the war and the legitimacy of the government in the process. While this chapter has focused on how domestic gains may depend upon re-theorizing the terms of the competition, and b) upon fighting in the right way according to prevailing norms of conduct, further research could investigate how international recognition is affected by *how* victory is achieved.

Gendered Status

Lastly, the heavily gendered theories of status, used by both advocates and critics of the war, speaks to serious blind-spots in IR's contemporary status research. Although feminists have highlighted how gendered discourses valorise war and military power in domestic and international contexts (Sjoberg, 2014; Tickner and Sjoberg, 2013), status research has yet to engage meaningfully engage with this scholarship (Beaumont and Røren, 2018). This is a pity because feminist theories may provide crucial clues to important question contemporary status research largely leaves unsatisfactorily answered: why are military power and war

associated with high status, and how is this association reproduced? While Gilady (2018), Renshon (2017) and O'Neil (2006) theorize that intrinsic qualities that generate symbolic utility – variations on conspicuousness, difficulty, and costliness— a feminist lens trains our gaze upon the broader discursive practices that may reproduce the value associated with war in a given context. Indeed, the Boer case provides preliminary evidence that status scholars should put on gendered lenses if they wish to explain why international status in certain activities (e.g. military power) are valued by domestic audiences. Indeed, victory in the Boer war was not only theorized as necessary to hold onto great power status, but co-constituted as a test of Britain's masculinity. Indeed, this is well illustrated how tactics employed towards – specifically the treatment of women – undermined the claims to glory upon victory. This aspect of the case, underlines the need for status scholars to go beyond showing that status motivated any given policy, but inquire into *how* status competition related to the prevailing norms of the domestic context. This would bring out from the background gender, race and perhaps other discourses that contribute to the status stakes of any given policy or activity.

Chapter V

Organizing and Resisting Status Competition: How PISA Shocked Norway

It is like coming home from the Winter Olympics
without a gold medal. And this time we can't
blame the Finns for doping
Kristen Clemet, 2001

Introduction

The previous chapters have painted a somewhat comfortable picture for states whereby governments can construct their own status hierarchies and insulate their citizens from rival theories of status. The general absence of consensually agreed upon criteria for international status and the ambiguity around recognition enables domestic societies to cultivate and insulate domestic theories of international status that minimize negative and maximize positive status comparisons with other states. Indeed, the previous chapter illustrated this by documenting how the British government (and citizens) were able to insulate themselves from international discourses regarding the Boer war, and thus develop a theory of the war's status implications that enabled citizens to express of pride at victory, legitimate the government, and generate electoral gains for the ruling conservative party. This chapter picks up the other side of the theoretical thread to investigate how global governance actors– via country performance indicators (CPIs)—have developed technologies to overcome this insulation and undermine states' autonomy to construct international hierarchies of their own making. In the process, it fleshes out theoretically and provides additional empirical support to recent works on how CPIs can exert influence upon sovereign states (especially Towns & Rumelili, 2017; Kelley & Simmons, 2015; 2019).

Since the 1990s, the number of organizations that rank countries according to their performance in social indicators has exploded (Broome and Quirk, 2015). These rankings claim to make visible states' relative performance in all manner of social fields from gender equality, to corruption, from ease of doing business to human trafficking (Cooley & Snyder, 2015). This so-called data revolution promises objective evidence-based policy-making and many elites have embraced this agenda with gusto. At the last count, the Global Benchmarking Database estimated that at least 275 country performance indexes exist, most of which emerged in the last decade (Global Benchmarking Database, v1.9). A growing body of research now shows that some CPIs enact considerable influence over those they rank (Kelley and Simmons, 2019).[218] Yet, the political, social and ethical effects of rankings remain only partially understood. Until fairly recently, most research tended to focus on CPIs methodological veracity rather than their influence on the very subjects they rank (Cooley &

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[218] *International Organization* recently dedicated a special volume theorizing and documenting this influence (Kelley and Simmons 2019) Key works in this agenda include: Cooley and Snyder (2015) Kelley and Simmons (2015); Davis, Kingsley, Merry, (2012) Kelley (2017) Merry (2016); Broome and Quirk (2015), Broome, Homolar and Kranke (2018); Freistein, (2016) Löwenheim (2008) Anderl (2016) Sharman (2009)

Snyder, 2015). This has begun to be addressed (Cooley and Synder, 2015; Kelley, 2017; Kelley and Simmons, 2015; 2019), though theorizing about the political, social and ethical consequences of this new "technology" of governance is far from exhausted Kelley and Simmons, 2019, p.504-506). Conventional legal and rationalist approaches offer only limited purchase on why actors would compete for position in a ranking when leading or lagging offers little direct material reward or punishment. Indeed, unlike EU law, which operates under legal-rational authority, or the World Bank, which can offer economic sticks and carrots tied to its structural adjustment packages, many global rankings have no such means to influence policy. This then begs the question that has animate recent work into CPIs effects: lacking legal authority and economic incentives, how and why do international rankings influence government policies?

Recent works have suggested that one answer to this question is that CPI's rankings encourage status concerns and even status competition in the policy domain being ranked (Kelley & Simmons', 2015; 2019; Towns and Rumelli 2017) I build upon these works but also flesh out empirically and theoretically how CPIs may exert influence – and cease to exert influence— in practice. Further, following my discussion in the previous chapters,[219] by flagging status concerns as explanation of CPI-influence, these works also generates a puzzle for this dissertation: if states can indeed develop their own favourable theories of international hierarchies and insulate themselves from rival theories, when there are few material carrots of sticks, why would a states strive to compete rather than just reject and insulate themselves from a CPI in which they place poorly? An additional line of inquiry is also opened up by my framework's concern for studying "status competition" as a discursive process that requires persistent discursive labour. Whereas prior works studying rankings have tended to stop at showing whether or not a CPI fermented status concerns and policy change, treating status competition as discursive process allows us to ask a more critical question: once a state has begun competing for status in a ranking, how can it escape that competition? This is important because – as several scholars of critical hue have argued – CPIs represent a worrisome technology of neo-liberal governmentality that encourages states to strive to meet targets they lack agency to decide upon.[220] By this account, the politics of politics is removed

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[219] I argued that governments have incentives to theorize their state's international status in a favourable manner in order to legitimate the state, however a similar puzzle can be made based upon SIT. SIT would suggest that there are psychological incentives for to discount unfavourable rankings, as *ceterus paribus*, we would expect people to prefer to avoid negative comparisons with outgroups.

[220] Academics are all too familiar with the effects of such benchmarking Espeland and Sauder (2007; 2016)

from the public sphere to the corridors of technocrats.[221] Expanding this critical line of inquiry into the side effects of CPIs, this chapter draws together the earlier discussion to highlight how CPIs may undermine governments and citizens autonomy over their domestic theories of international hierarchy, yet as the following chapter shows, there are (some) grounds to believe this may prove temporary.

By way of exploring how CPI's can influence states policy and overcome national insulation, this article investigates Norway's responses to the PISA education ranking. As I will outline below, the OECD's authority in education, PISA's intensive efforts at dissemination, and the fact that its referent—education—is a valued attribute in all modern societies, makes it a CPI with a plausible chance of overcoming national insulation.[222] PISA is also a good case for methodological reasons: the OECD does not possess any direct material carrots or sticks, which means that looming, more parsimonious explanations of influence under anarchy are easier to rebut. Perhaps the best known scholarship seeking to demonstrate how CPIs exert social pressure via status competition (Kelley and Simmons, 2015; Kelley, 2017) analyses a CPI produced by the US and consequently leaves doubts about what is doing the work: the ranking or the latent material power of the ranker.[223] Finally, as I noted in chapter 3, Norway and education reform offer a deliberately different case with which to illustrate the utility of my grammar of status framework; if it can provide useful insights into such radically different cases as a 19th century colonial war and a Norway's education reforms, then it generates confidence that it may have broader "transferability".

Indeed, the chapter contends that the education status hierarchy constructed and circulated by PISA was *necessary* for legitimating a series of Norwegian education policy reforms, or at the very least, explaining the timing and shape that they took. First of all, the publication of

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[221] These decisions once made become very difficult to contest, yet are often influential upon states' domestic politics (Broome and Quirk, 2015).

[222] PISA also offers a convenient case study because although 87 articles have investigated the "effects" of this ranking – the oft cited "PISA shock" – a recent survey of PISA literature laments, this research needs to "better conceptualize" how and why the shock works (Pons, 2017). Thus, although this chapter mainly addresses IR by offering a useful means of conceptualizing global rankings and how they work, it also speaks to a deficit in the education literature.

[223] Kelley and Simmons, (2015; Kelley 2017) investigations into US produced Human Trafficking Index (HTI), cannot rule out that states may respond to the ranking because the US has several sticks and carrots to wield in other arenas. Further, although they mention status, the HDI uses absolute tiers and thus does not produce at the same status dynamic as a relative ranking (see chapter 1). Finally, Ann Towns and Rumelili (2017) theorize the social pressure stemming from relative international norms but provide only a brief empirical illustration (the Ease of Doing Business Index), which also generates external financial incentives. While my approach departs from both in significant ways, this research has laid considerable groundwork upon which I will build here.

PISA rankings in Norway enabled domestic actors to administer what I call a "status shock" –public opprobrium that Norway positioned lower internationally than expected— which was used to identify relative position in the ranking as a problem in need of a remedy. The ranking thus enabled the government to wield the grammar of status to legitimate its reforms, which became the primary logic of legitimation for reform (rather than legitimation via reference to absolute performance or problems). PISA could work in this way because it provided a credible *new* means of assessing international status, and for at least the first decade, it successfully generated inter-subjective, inter-party agreement within Norway about the rules of the international education system hierarchy. This consensus enabled a competitive process to emerge in a manner consonant with the logic of status competition. However, the analysis also illuminates how a second more critical reflexive discourse emerged in domestic politics. Beginning as a minority voice amongst teachers and academics, these arguments eventually spread to mainstream political parties. Several of which now assert that Norway should opt out of the PISA on the grounds that the rankings rules do not reflect Norwegian values. Making the most of my longitudinal research design, the case thus illustrates how the process of competition for status in the PISA-defined hierarchy, inspired a critical reflexivity about the game itself that is undermining its potential for legitimating further reforms.

CPIs: Universalising Theories of Status Competition

This section ties together my theoretical framework with the growing research into CPIs. To recap, earlier I defined an ideal status competition as one in which competitors share the same understanding of the rules of the game, have near perfect information about one another's relative performance and share a common understanding of what constitutes winning. This is much more likely to obtain when the organiser of a competition enjoys legitimate authority, the rules are uncontested, and those playing the game join voluntarily. Unsurprisingly, such status competitions are far easier to organise among individuals than among sovereign states. As the introduction argued, the difficulty involved in reaching agreement about both the rules of the game, and acquiring credible information about other state's performance, undermines the agreement over relative position and thus what actions should be undertaken to compete. While these conditions hinder the *ideal* of status competition being reached, I argued that nonetheless, the logic of international status competition may still inform government behaviour and (de)legitimate particular policies.

This section suggests that CPIs can be understood as an *attempt* to organize and institutionalize status competition among states in particular policy domains. Although such rankings seldom succeed *in toto*, I argue that CPIs can nonetheless enable the grammar of status to be wielded domestically, potentially with significant policy consequences. The section begins by demonstrating how rankings embody the logic of status competition, before drawing on extant research to theorize how and why CPIs can enable the grammar status to be wielded in domestic politics and potentially overcome the barriers to domestic agreement about the nature of international status hierarchies.[224]

Relative Rankings: Embodying the Logic of Status Competition

It is not difficult to diagnose that CPIs package information in a manner that embodies the logic of status competition defined in chapter 1. To take conventional definition of global indicators:

> An indicator is a named collection of *rank-ordered data* that purports to represent the past or projected *performance* of different units. The data are generated through a process that simplifies raw data about a complex social phenomenon. The data, in this simplified and processed form, are capable of being *used to compare* particular units of analysis (such as countries or institutions or corporations), synchronically or over time, and to evaluate their performance by reference to one or more standards. (my emphasis) (Davis et al., 2012: 5)

I have highlighted the key components of this definition that are theoretically relevant to the logic of status competition. First, a status competition *always* requires a "global comparison" between competitors rather than internal comparison based upon an actor's individual performance (Onuf, 1989, p.267). When indicators are packaged into transitive rankings, they thus represent an idealized hierarchical context for a status competition. In this way, such rankings provide the structure—or "playing field"—within which status competition between actors can unfold (Beaumont, 2017d, p.9;). Second, for status competition to occur the status attributes must be changeable: if they cannot change (e.g. like a biologically-defined racial hierarchy) actors cannot compete, or indeed have a "performance" (Chapter 1). Country performance indicators all fit with this; they measure social qualities that to varying degrees can change. Third, this performance is then problematized via their packaging in relative rankings in which states comparative performance is illuminated and emphasized. Thus, when

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[224] It is testament to the difficulty of organising a rule governed status competition under anarchy that the extant rankings research has dedicated such significant labour to theorizing the conditions under which rankings can influence state behaviour (Kelley and Simmons, 2015; 2019).

circulated to rankees, knowledge of *others* performance relative to one's own defines good and bad, not the absolute performance itself. It is this emphasis relative international performance, which offers the novelty in this governance technology.[225] In sum, a relative ranking embodies the logic of international status competition and when wielded in practice they mobilize the grammar of status (the discursive manifestation of that logic).

Indeed, if those ranked by a CPI agreed with the rules and valued the game – like an Olympic competition – then the ideal of a status competition would likely be realised. Yet reality seldom approaches the ideal: it is one thing to place states in an idealised hierarchical context, it is quite another to get all states to agree to the rules and compete. Indeed, few if any CPI enjoys such *universal* agreement about the legitimacy and value of the competition[226] Given some disagreement over the rules of the game and the possibility that some players will not play, we can still ask: even if the ideal is not reached, how could CPIs enable and encourage their particular theory of status competition to inform domestic practice? How might they foster inter-state and inter-citizen agreement over the rules and thus overcome the discursive insulation that states enjoy? How do they generate prizes and pride that encourage competition? To answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at the processes through which CPIs are developed, packaged, and circulated and theorize how and why they might be used by domestic actors.

Theorizing Status Hierarchies: Technocratic Ranking and Rule Production

CPI's attempt to set the rules of the game and assess and allocate states' status within a given field. In this way, CPIs take on the role of a governing body that assesses state performance and allocate status in various fields of policy practice (Kelley and Simmons, 2015; 2019; also see Towns & Rumelili 2017). In many cases they allocate status in arenas where attempting to make credible comparisons with other states would have proven impractical or costly for states to undertake.[227] Rankings do this by measuring and quantifying hitherto private and diffuse practices (e.g. gender quality, democracy, corruption) in order generate equivalence and thus render "performance" in these practices comparable. Thus, when a ranking is

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[225] It is worth noting that Miller & Rose (2008) list several related "technologies" related to auditing and indicators but although they leave the door open for rankings, they do not mention them.

[226] Arguably GDP rankings come closest, though several rival measures (e.g. the Human Development Index) contest privileged status as a measure of social welfare and/or economic performance (e.g. Fleurbaey, 2009)

[227] It is worth noting that state-produced rankings would likely face credibility problems. Although the USA produced human trafficking index's apparent success in inducing policy change would appear to suggest otherwise (e.g. Kelley and Simmons, 2015), given that the U.S. has lurking sticks and carrots it is questionable whether status concerns do the influencing here.

created, it *expands* the range of activities that international comparisons can be made and potentially enables inter-subjective (inter-state and inter-citizen) agreement about one another's status performance.

At the same time as expanding the range of policy domains constituted in terms of rank-ordered international status hierarchies, CPIs also tacitly promote their particular *theory* of international status in the activity in question: the rules of comparisons and empirical basis for assessing performance. As Cooley (2015) points out, *all* rankings tacitly embody theories of what they purport to measure. Regardless of what they wish to measure, CPIs undertake "ontological theorizing" (Guzzini, 2013,p.434), because they must answer questions like "What *is* gender equality", "what *is* democracy?" before they can even begin to assess performance. This process inevitably involves deciding what to count and what can be left on the cutting room floor. Even once this is decided, the ranker must decide how to weigh the indicator's inputs. Thus, despite their objective-looking end-product, CPIs always embody normative and political judgements (Merry and Conley, 2011, p84; Bhuta, 2015, p.100; Snyder and Cooley, 2015, p183;) or to paraphrase Cathy O'Neil, CPIs are opinions dressed in math (O'Neil, 2017,p.21). Thus, the technocratic process of describing, counting (and *not* counting), and comparing complex social phenomenon, establishes the rules of the status competition behind closed doors and beyond domestic politics.

Moreover, in this process of codifying the rules of their ranking and circulating the results, CPIs attempt to *universalize* the criterion by which comparisons are made and status is judged. As I noted in the introduction, without considerable discursive labour it is quite possible for lack of both information and agreement over the terms of comparison, to allow multiple countries to simultaneously believe in their own superiority in any given activity. In the cases of public goods provision, the sheer complexity and cost involved in making plausible comparisons insulates states and citizens from unfavourable international comparisons. For instance, prior to the establishment of the OECD's PISA education rankings, several countries could simultaneously claim they had the best education in the world. Reflecting upon the pre-PISA days, the OECD's head of education research told the Economist: "In 1995, at the first meeting of OECD ministers I attended, every country boasted of its own success and its own brilliant reforms. Now international comparisons make it clear who is failing. There is no place to hide." (Economist, 2008) In this way, I suggest that when CPIs are circulated to domestic audiences, they import a foreign theory of international status and thus potentially undermine a state's insulation from unfavourable international comparisons. But

why should citizens pay attention to a CPI developed by foreign technocrats? Are states and their citizens not well conditioned to discount foreign assessments and value judgements? *Cetarus paribus*, countries might be expected to be sceptical to the imposition of "foreign" values and reject a ranking for instrumental reasons if it places them lower than they expected (see: Towns & Rumelili, 2017, p11).

Status Narrative Esperanto: Welding Science and Simple Status Stories

CPIs overcome these obstacles in three ways. CPI's strive to overcome this national insulation by packaging and circulating information in rankings in a manner well designed to encourage "reactivity" among states. Since Hawthorn, scientists have known that human subjects react to being observed and evaluated. In mainstream social science this reflexive "reactivity" is often understood as a problem to be minimized, but it is exactly this social effect organizations seek to harness with rankings (Espeland and Sauder, 2016). Indeed, CPIs theorize, assess, and then *circulate* states' status performance to their populations. The plan is clearly to inspire a reaction, one that partly relies upon inspiring status concerns (Towns and Rumelili 2017; Kelley and Simmons' 2019). Yet, for a CPI to become salient in a country's domestic political discourse, it must be publicly known and the ranking must be considered legitimate and credible (Kelley, 2017). Regarding legitimacy and credibility, numerical rankings borrow the illusion of objectivity and precision of numbers to generate a science-y appearance. While most, if not all, leading CPIs are known to suffer from well-known "dodgy data" problems, as Broome and colleagues argue, CPIs can nonetheless generate authority from "piggybacking on the status of the organizations that produce them" and the veneer of scientific credibility that their mathematical production processes provide (Broome et al., 2018, p. 4).[228]

Moreover, rankings embody, what I called in chapter 2, status narratives: they construct winners, losers and if iterative, simple stories or rising, falling, and stagnation. As with other types of narratives, status narratives construct subject positions and imply and legitimate a course of action (Subotic, 2016, p 312): to compete in the competition (chapter 2) and delegitimise alternatives (letting rivals win). Just as with ordinary narratives, CPI's status narratives simplify complex phenomenon and generate their rhetorical power from their simplicity and their familiarity. While the stories nation states tell about themselves are spatially and socially limited by language (Anderson, 2016 [1983], p.46-47), the narratives

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[228] Indeed, even well-established rankings, such as GDP, suffer from serious validity issues (Jerven, 2013)

embodied in rankings travel across borders easily. Crucially, the language of this discourse is a numerical ranking, which has a universal legibility that ordinary languages lack. Thus, it is useful to think of rankings as a kind of narrative Esperanto. Ultimately, the ability of CPIs to translate status hierarchies across borders stems from combining the legitimacy associated with science with the legibility of numerical rankings, together with the rhetorical power of narratives.

Counter-intuitively, CPIs highlight the importance of agreed upon rules for status competition precisely because they hide them away. Indeed, it is by hiding the rules – and the value judgements therein—that enables rankings to overcome potential domestic resistance to foreign status hierarchies. Indeed, the countries populations are presented with the outcome of comparisons, whose terms have been decided earlier by technocrats behind closed doors (Broome, Homolar, and Quirk, 2018). If mobilised effectively, instead of debating value judgements embodied in the hierarchy, a successful CPI may instead inspire debate about how best to triumph in the hierarchy. This process of contestation of *how* to compete rather than *whether* to compete – as I will illustrate below – serves to reinforce, reproduce and reify the legitimacy of the rules of the competition. However, this is not a one-off event, and in line with my discursive conception of status as domestic practice, it should take labour to maintain the salience of these theories of international hierarchy. As such, the hidden value judgements are always potentially contestable and vulnerable to attack from determined domestic actors.

Generating Pride and Prizes

So far I have elaborated how international rankings embody the grammar of status, while simultaneously universalizing and hiding value judgements that generate the rules of the competition. Further, I argued that the packaging of information in the form of transitive rankings enables easy narratives of winning and losing to cross national borders, and can generate legitimacy from their scientific appearance (scientism). However, that alone would likely not prove enough, as chapter 1 suggested, a status competition requires some prizes or pride to be at stake to encourage players to compete. Given that CPIs are designed to inspire competition for position in a social hierarchy, the stakes they generate are similar to those discussed in chapter 2.

First, a CPI can provide external incentives to compete: prizes. By providing valuable information about states' qualities that would be costly and difficult for interested parties to

obtain individually, CPIs can establish and operate as a focal point around which international actors may distribute rewards and organise (Cooley and Snyder 2015, p.24). For instance, firms use Ease of Doing Business index to inform their investment decisions and thus reward countries that compete according to their definition of easy business (Schueth, 2015). Conversely the Transparency International's corruption index informs several important actors' development aid decisions. States may also receive international praise and backpatting for good performance on a CPI.

Second, CPIs are well-designed to manufacture the symbolic utility associated with status: pride and self-esteem. As Lilach Gilady notes, for something to become an international status symbol it must be conspicuous, difficult, costly, and exclusive (Gilady, 2018; also, O'Neil, 2006). Until international rankings burgeoned in the 1990s, performance in public policy areas like education, healthcare and gender equality (etc.) could not meet this demand for conspicuousness and would made poor status symbols (see: Gilady 2018; O'Neill, 2006). Yet, by packaging performance in a relative transitive ranking, CPIs are able to both make performance conspicuous, and accentuate the scarcity and difficulty of achieving good performance. Relatedly, rankings enable easy relative comparisons in performance among the global population that is ranked by the CPI. Thus, on top of the symbolic value for finishing top, CPIs enable and encourage competition for position between rivals and peers lower down the rankings. From a SIT perspective, when these comparisons concern qualities the in-group considers valuable, such invidious comparisons with peers[229] provide the basis for esteem and in-group identification. The desire to achieve or maintain such esteem and in-group identification and avoid the inverse may motivate activities designed to increase position in a CPI: status seeking.

Third, competing in a CPI may be required to please the group: the citizens. The qualities CPIs measure are almost per definition associated with an activity of intrinsic value: one only measures what one treasures. Thus, if a country already treasured that which the CPI measures, then one might assume that a CPI's effects would prove moot; the state would already have invested in the activity and have reached a standard with which the citizens are content. Yet, CPIs provide new rules of defining "good" performance. First, the absolute standards that inform the ranking are unlikely to be identical to those the government had

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[229] As several scholars have pointed out, "status is local" in that negative comparisons to others that are considered in the same peer group (whether for geographic or social reasons) are more salient to the self. For instance, Norway cares much more about how it compares to Sweden than the United States (Røren, 2019).

hitherto used. Second, good performance in a relative ranking is explicitly defined by relative comparisons to other countries. Thus, if a CPI becomes salient, CPIs can redefine "good" performance and thus undermine the government's claims to be performing satisfactorily in the activity being measured. In such cases, the CPI supplants domestic standards and will provide incentives for the government to compete in the CPI-defined hierarchy.

Two points are necessary to emphasise. First, CPIs can generate rewards and punishments quite apart from any international material carrots or sticks. While prior social-psychology inspired work has typically focused on inter-state practices of recognition, as the second point suggests, CPIs can be treated as both an actor bestowing recognition upon a target and also a "status recognition conduit" for international society (Beaumont 2017, p.5). Thus, it is consistent with prior status work to suggest that CPIs can inspire status competition by providing "intrinsic" rewards for high position and punishments for low position (pride and shame respectively). However, the final mechanism listed – replacing internal absolute goals for assessing quality with quality determined by international comparisons – is less well covered by extant status work. As I noted in the introduction, prior work has generally taken for granted the inter-subjective agreement over the rules of any given status competition and so they lack a means of theorizing the introduction of new rules of international competition. Meanwhile those treating the state as unitary lack the means to theorize how status performance can relate to government legitimacy. Yet if a CPI – which as we saw above, necessarily embodies the logic of status competition – provides the means by which a state's policy performance is assessed by its citizens and responded to by the government, then the government is at the same time (tacitly) competing by the logic of international status competition. Indeed, even if distinct status motivations cannot be disentangled, this type of response to a CPI still necessarily constitutes a rule governed competition for position in an inter-subjective international hierarchy. As such, when CPIs get used as means of establishing "good performance" by the state, it would also constitute an instance of the grammar of international status competition informing and legitimate action.

Domestic Politics and Discursive Mechanisms: Wielding Grammar of Status

Even if a CPI is visible, credible and offers the potential of some kind of reward for states, whether a GPI informs policy will necessarily depend upon domestic political processes. [230] Rather than deducing whether the ranking motivated an outcome, my approach demands I investigate whether and how representations of international hierarchies were mobilised and invoked by domestic actors as grounds for taking action. Because CPIs are ontologically meaningful to statesmen and their populations, rather than just (potentially) epistemologically useful to researchers, we need to theorize how the rankings enter the public sphere and how they may be used once there: as consciously utilized, governmental technologies.[231] Following the lead of other CPI research, rather than directly causing an effect, rankings can be understood as providing *discursive resources*: potentially salient information that may be mobilized in the domestic sphere to legitimate policy change or attack political opponents. In this way, and when amplified by the press, it may provide the "catalytic" that may be used by domestic actors to successfully demand reforms (Kelley, 2017: 13; Kelley and Simmons, 2019, p499-501)**.**

Kelley and Simmons (2019, p.499-500) provide a useful starting point here for theorizing how rankings get used in domestic politics. They suggest that domestic groups can use the comparisons provided by the rankings to demand reforms aimed at improving the ranking: via the ballot box, critiques in the media, as well as through lobbying and traditional forms of protest. They go on to suggest that "in responsive regimes" such demands might elicit policy change" or at least provide incentives for the "government to claim they are addressing the issue" (Kelley 2019, p.500). This is a good start, but the authors go on to suggest that "where institutions repress public input and suppress political demands, governments may respond not with reform, but by denigrating the GPI or its creator" (ibid). Thus, "denigrating" the ranking becomes a response associated with repressive regimes, while responding to rankings implies a "responsive regime". I see no reason to make this association; it is logically possible for domestic actors to use a dubious CPI to call for change

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[230] Or any international status hierarchy (Ward, 2013). Ward 2017, p.4) develops this argument in more depth arguing that international status provides "political resource that influences domestic contests over foreign policy". My argument here resembles Ward's in that I also suggest international status operates as a resource in domestic politics. However, I show how international rankings can constitute a domestic policy in terms of international status too. Further, Ward's theorizes how states respond to the perception of status denial, whereas I problematize how government's and citizens interpret and re-interpret the nature of the international hierarchy.

[231] This is quite different from the approach taken by large N status research. Here they may refer to "subjective" status hierarchies, but these are invariably constructed by the analyst (e.g. rankings of aggregate levels of diplomatic recognition) rather than being inter-subjectively present in the "real world" (e.g. Renshon, 2017; Volgy et al., 2011a; Røren, 2020).

that a responsive regime may quite reasonably reject (by denigrating the ranking). Second, a repressive regime may itself wield a ranking to legitimate reforms its citizens may otherwise object to. Third, a responsive regime may include various political parties and supporters that disagree about the legitimacy of a particular CPI and thus some may prefer to use it to legitimate reforms while the other may not. In fact, as I will show below, being responsive may involve denigrating a ranking.

Typically, international status concerns are said to develop when states snub another state that believed it warranted deference or social recognition (e.g. Wohlforth, 2014), or more gradually, when states rise in material capability, yet do not see their privileges in international society increase accordingly (e.g. Renshon, 2017; Gilpin, 1983). Taking a similar tack, I suggest that rankings provide the discursive resources for domestic actors to induce status concerns and even a "status shock" among its domestic population. As the name implies, status shocks involve the public opprobrium that occurs when a collective learns abruptly that their status—their position in a given social hierarchy—is lower than they expected it to be. Thus, there needs to be credible *new* information about the relative status of a state in a given hierarchy and this new information needs to diverge to some significant degree from what the previous status was, or was assumed to be (similar to expecting recognition or deference and not receiving it). The key here is the gap between expected status and a credible presentation of "real status". It is thus not finishing *low* itself that would cause a shock, but lower than expected or finishing lower than rivals.[232] New rankings are well suited to induce this type of status shock because they often measure and render equivalent previously opaque social qualities that would not otherwise be easily comparable e.g. press freedom, gender equality and education. Administering a shock enables an actor to enact a plot that "something must be done" to remedy the state of affairs: "we must do what it takes to rise in the rankings". Akin to how securitization theorizes how the grammar of security enables the breaking of normal rules of politics, so does such a status shock enable action to remedy a status shortcoming.

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[232] Conversely, lots of countries finish low in lots of indicators and it may not induce status concerns let alone a shock. For example, Saudi Arabia ranking low on gender equality is unlikely to cause a status concerns because they would expect, and even want to place low.

However, we cannot assume status shocks automatically induce policy change. Rather I suggest there is a degree of contingency: while states may seek to make policies to redress their low status position in the rankings, the collective may also realign their expectations to mediocrity, or they may reject the rankings methodology and/or legitimacy altogether (Kelley, 2017; Towns and Rumelili, 2017). However, when a state *does* choose the first, the rankee may find themselves framed as a player in an ongoing *status competition*.

The moment the government pursues policies to improve their country's ranking they have begun to "compete", however, I would suggest that *competition* is analytically better understood as *a process* that captures how continuous iterative efforts feedback into a country's position in the rankings (Kelley and Simmons 2015). Such a process, in the extreme, may end up resembling Lewis Carrol's Queen's Race, in which "it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place". If players get "taken by the game"(Pouliot, 2014: 198), then it implies that rankings will provide a constant supply of discursive resources to legitimate policy reform. Competing in the rankings may even become institutionalized. For instance, (Espeland and Sauder, 2016) document how concern for *U.S. News and World Report* law school ranking has become embedded in the day-to-day organization practices in which the effect on performance is routinely taken into account. Although it has seldom been considered, it is also possible that players may give up on the game, even once they have begun playing. Indeed, treating the theories of international hierarchies found in domestic politics as the triumph of considerable ongoing discursive labour, behooves us to investigate the processes that keep a particular theory of international status competition in use, the alternatives that have been marginalized, and any contestation that may be ongoing. Indeed, as the empirical analysis will demonstrate, the process of competition may prompt critical reflexivity among players about the value of the game itself.

PISA Rankings and Education Status Competition

The previous section established how international rankings can *theoretically* introduce a new theory of international status in a policy domain, one that can be used to administer status shocks and instigate the logic of status competition. The next section explores this possibility by investigating how Norway responded to the OECD's PISA education rankings. PISA seeks to measure the educational performance of students (aged 15) across the OECD and other participating countries. Since 2000, PISA has assessed science reading, and maths levels

of participating countries' students on a tri-annual basis (PISA, N.D). Thus, PISA rankings do not directly compare the actual education practices. In order to simplify these complex phenomena and render equivalence, PISA tests "the skills and knowledge" of 500,000 students from the participating countries and uses the numerical scores it generates as a proxy for the quality of their "education systems" (PISA, N.D). While PISA has many critics within academia,[233] because states *pay* for the privilege of taking part in PISA, they tacitly grant it *legitimate authority* in education. Indeed, PISA itself is widely circulated and recognized as a *credible* indicator of education (Carvalho, 2012). Critically for our purposes here, PISA packages its studies in relational transitive ranking.

A great deal of research has been dedicated to outlining methodological and normative issues associated with PISA (e.g. Pons, 2011; Singe & Braun 2018), however, following the discussion above, we need only foreground three characteristics of the PISA rankings process. First, PISA defines what constitutes literacy, maths and science skills and thus sets the rules for its international comparisons. Second, and more controversially, PISA frequently presents these scores as a measure of the quality of countries' "national education system" and uses its indicators as a means to highlight and promote best practices. Indeed, PISA's official reports "are packed with policy recommendations regarding schools and educational governance" (Sjøberg, 2019, 658). Thus, not only does it propose a theory of what constitutes good literacy math and science, but it tacitly proposes a grand theory of the quality of education. Third, while PISA makes the absolute performance and individual case studies available, PISA itself promotes the league tables and thus encourages the press to focus on the relational performance in the rankings (Sjøberg, 2019 p681-682). It is thus not a coincidence that national media tend to present the results in a manner akin to the Olympics (e.g. Fig.1).

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[233] In 2014 dozens of leading education academics wrote an open letter to the head of PISA calling for a moratorium on PISA testing on the grounds that it was "damaging education worldwide" (*Guardian*, 6 May 2014).

Which countries are best at reading?	Which countries are best at maths?
Top 12	**Top 12**
01 **Singapore** ★	01 **Singapore** ★
02 **China: Hong Kong** ★	02 **China: Hong Kong** ★
03 **Canada** ★	03 **China: Macao** ★
04 Finland	04 Taiwan
05 Ireland	05 Japan
06 Estonia	06 China: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong
07 South Korea	07 South Korea
08 Japan	08 Switzerland
09 Norway	09 Estonia
10 New Zealand	10 Canada
11 Germany	11 Netherlands
12 China: Macao	12 Denmark

Figure 1. League Tables Used by the BBC to Report the PISA Results in 2015 (BBC, 2016)

Thus, PISA is well designed to overcome national insulation in the manner described above. The next section investigates the following questions: *how* did PISA enable policy reform; was the grammar of status competition key for legitimating the timing and substance of Norway's education reforms? Here, I pay attention to whether and how grammar of status in the PISA rankings was mobilised in order legitimate to action or delegitimate inaction. The goal is not to read minds, but rather to interpret whether a ranking *made possible*, or provided the discursive resources that were necessary for "enabling" policy change (Neumann, 2008a). Part of this interpretative process involves assessing whether the policies changed in accordance with the values embedded within the rankings methodology: the extent to which policy reforms were aimed at improving the PISA position. I will also pay heed to other looming alternative logics of legitimation associated with the policy field in question: striving to meet an absolute standard of education quality or addressing absolute problems identified by PISA. Second, I will address the Critical question that a longitudinal discourse analysis makes possible: to what extent did PISA's theory of international education status meet resistance and if so, where, when and how did it emerge and with what consequence? Finally, although not a rival explanation, it is of theoretical interest to explore empirically whether

and what sort of prizes, pride and group-pleasing domestic actors theorized to be at stake in PISA's education status competition.

Pre-PISA Reforms: Education reforms were not always about international competition

In order to generate analytical traction on Norway's PISA period (2000-present) it is necessarily to sketch the policy landscape pre-PISA. Norway's education system has undergone several major reforms – often expansions of provision – over the course of the last century.[234] We need not dwell on the history of reform nor the make-up of the Norwegian system, however, three characteristics of Norway's pre-PISA require highlighting. First, both PISA advocates and critics agree that prior to PISA there was a lack of evidence with which to assess Norwegian schools, which fostered considerable disagreement about how to assess the quality of Norway's education. For instance, the State Secretary for Education during Norway's PISA shock, the social scientist Helge Ole Bergeson (2006, p.42), claimed that pre-PISA, Norwegians' beliefs about the quality of the school system were ideologically driven rather than data driven.[235] If Bergeson might be expected to present PISA as a new dawn, Norway's most prominent PISA critic also agrees:

> Norwegian schools lived for a long time in an innocent state. The community trusted that the schools were good and that the teachers did their job. We did not participate in international tests, we did not have national tests, we did not have national inspectors who came to school to collect data or give advice. Some felt that we had the best schools in the world, while others claimed they were at the bottom. The two extremes had one thing in common, namely that they had no data to substantiate the claims. The quality of the school was a matter of faith - and the school was then also under the Ministry of Church and Education. Now it's called the Ministry of Education. (Sjøberg, 2014, p.30) [236]

Thus, although allusions to international quality could be made, they were difficult to agree upon. The lack of means of evaluation of educational outcomes would not stop Norwegian politicians from proclaiming the Norwegian system to be the best in the world (e.g. Bjartmar Gjerde, 1975)[237] While the school system had its critics, especially among the right, they had little evidence to challenge claims Norway's schools were the envy of the world (Bergeson, 2006, p.39).

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[234] See Telhaug and Aasen (1999) for a historical overview. See Bergesen (2006, chapter 1) for critical review from the liberal perspective that would inform the governments post-PISA reforms.

[235] Writing in a book that gave a first-hand account of the politics of the PISA shock—*The Battle For Knowledge About Schools* (2006).

[236] Sometimes with the help of a dictionary and occasionally my partner, I translated all the Norwegian quotes from primary and secondary sources.

[237] Cited in Bergeson, 2006, p.39; citing Telhaug and Miediås (2003, p.318)

Second, at an academic and policy level Norway, as part of Scandinavia–had fostered an "exceptionalist frame of mind" whereby Norway saw its education as profoundly "different from schools elsewhere" (Isaksen, 2015, p. 59). This point of view emphasized how Norway – and other Scandinavian countries' – education system offered a more far ranging education about life and citizen responsibility (e.g. Ekholm & Ploug Olsen, 1991, p. 149). Rather than assessing outcomes, the Norwegian tradition since the Second World War had been related to quality as a function of structure of the system and the broad values promoted in the curriculum (Isaksen, 2015, p 60). This is reflected in the substance of the last major education reform prior to the PISA era: Reform 97, which provided an expanded and some argue an excessively comprehensive taxonomy of aims of education (Bergeson, 2006, p.35). Noticeably, the reform offered no institutionalised means of assessing these aims realization. While not universally endorsed (e.g. Bergeson, 2006), this framework for understanding quality in terms of inputs and structural quality had been historically dominant at the government policy level and among Norwegian academics (Isaksen, 2015, p. 60-65).

Indeed, third, and finally, while Norway had received OECD (1987, cited in Isaksen, 2015, p.52) advice to implement national testing in the late 1980s and had taken it under consideration, following the OECD recommendations, the Government-sponsored research into the question of whether to introduce national evaluation of teaching ended up rejecting all form of national evaluation (Granheim, Lundgren, & Tiller, 1990 cited in Isaksen, 2015, p. 74). While the question of introducing some kind of education output-evaluation would be debated throughout the 1990s, it got bogged down over what to measure and how to define it (Isaksen, 2015, p.75-77) Indeed, just a couple of years prior to the first PISA results, a Report to Pariliament, *Aiming for Higher Goals*, concluded that did not need a Norway national assessment system (Isaksen, 2015, p.76-77) Although the idea was in circulation, there was little public pressure to introduce national evaluation while it would need to overcome a historical scepticism to national testing from the teachers union (Isaksen, 2015, p. 67; Bergeson, 2006).[238]

These three conditions in Norway's education politics prior to PISA – the lack of evidence with which to compare internationally Norwegian schools' education output performance, a policy level preference for evaluating quality via inputs and the broadness of values Norwegian

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[238] Historically, Norway had even taken pride in their rejection of national testing. According to an OECD report in 1976, Norwegian educators regarded the abolishment of national testing one of the major achievements of Norwegian policy" (OECD, 1976, p. 86 cited in Isaksen, 2015, p.60).

education provided, and an ambivalence towards national testing (despite OECD recommendations)—provide crucial context to the analysis that follows. If Norway was generally eager to follow OECD education advice prior to PISA, then it might suggest that legitimation via PISA performance was merely window dressing to reforms that would have happened anyway. However, this is patently not the case and thus we can ask: How did PISA change the education policy discourse such that it became possible to enact a raft of new reforms, including some that had been explicitly rejected just a couple of years earlier?

What was the Shock in Norway's "PISA Shock"?

It is well established that Norway suffered what has become known as a "PISA Shock" (Breakspear, 2012; Østerud, 2016; Sjøberg, 2014). In short, PISA shocks refer to the public outcry that accompanies the results of a PISA results that brings with it call to "do something". In particular, Germany, Switzerland, and Norway are usually cited as examples (Breakspear, 2012). But what exactly constitutes the shock in the PISA shock remains unclear (Pons, 2017). This chapter contends that the "PISA shock" is partly constituted by a *status shock*: the discovery that a valued attribute or quality that a social collective considered important for their collective self-esteem, the state's legitimacy, and/or a symbol of superiority over outgroups, gets undermined or challenged. The effects a status shock would imply expressions of public opprobrium at the lower than expected position in an international hierarchy, and prompt urgent calls to remedy the low status. As we shall see, Norway's response to PISA displays these characteristics. Again, to emphasize, for it to qualify as a status shock the *problem* that is illuminated is primarily articulated in reference to being worse, or falling behind other peers, *not* concern for the absolute performance in the attribute itself.

Indeed, both the press reports and the politicians' response to PISA indicate that what most shocked Norway was their lower than expected *position* in the rankings. The first ever PISA results were published in December 2001 and Norway ranked around the OECD average in maths, science and literacy (www.pisa.oecd.org). *Dagbladet* led the story with the headline, "Norway is a school loser" (Ramnefjell, 5 Dec 2001). The article goes on to complain "Norwegian 15-year-old students are just average compared with their peers in the other 31 OECD countries." Nowhere in the article does *Dagbladet* make reference to the absolute performance in terms of the standards that Norwegian students reached. These examples

were reflective of broader public response, for instance, Per Østerud (2016, p. 15) reflects that: "The shock of that Norwegian schools were not among the best in the world, created a situation of fear and perplexity and it was expected that someone intervene quickly and put things right." What might appear strange though, is that Norway did not perform so badly: its scores were average among the OECD and in absolute terms, not so far away from the leader, Finland. Indeed, as Sjørberg (2014, p. 33) notes, the debate the PISA rankings inspired in Norway, focused on relative position and overlooked how the absolute differences separating country performance were often so small they scarcely warranted political or educational alarm.

Administering a Status Shock; Problematizing PISA Position & Framing A Status Competition

Indeed, it is misleading to treat Norway's "PISA shock" as the direct result of PISA. Although PISA's practices of presentation and dissemination facilitate status concerns, in Norway they could also rely upon a new government willing to actively render PISA as a crucial status competition, amplify domestic status concerns, and thus administer a status shock. Indeed, the results were jumped upon by the recently elected conservative government, who had long wanted to reform Norway's school system but knew that they would likely face stiff resistance from teachers, unions, and opposition parties (Bergeson, 2006). At the press conference where the minister of education Kristin Clemet (2001-2005) announced the results, she provides a near ideal example of how an international rankings provide a discursive resource that can be transformed into a powerful status narrative. Framing the results to the press, Clemet likened Norway's performance to the archetypal status competition (chapter 1): "This is disappointing. It is like coming home from the Winter Olympics without a gold medal. And this time we can't blame the Finns for doping" (quoted in Ramnefjell, 5 Dec 2001).[239] It is not a coincidence that she used the *Winter* Olympics for her analogy: a status competition that Norway excels and expects to excel in. It is also not surprising given her framing, that

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[239] There is no little irony here given that several countries "game" the rankings whether intentionally or unintentionally: for instance, Finland has very low levels of migration, while South Korea spend the equivalent of 2.5% of GDP on private tutoring (Singer & Braun, 2018; Simola, 2005). Both factors have been found to influence PISA scores yet the relative rankings promoted by PISA and in the press overlook this. This irony would become apparent a decade later, when reporting accusations of in cheating in PISA, *Aftenposten* did not forget to recount Clemet's words from 2001. For its part, Norway itself has increasingly excluded weaker students from the tests. The exclusion rate rose 250% between 2000 and 2015 (the sharpest rise among OECD countries in the period) and by 2015 had the 4th highest exclusion rates among participating countries (Aursand, 2018, p.20-22). Whether this is intentional "doping" or not, Sjøberg (2019,p 660) has pointed out, Norway's improvements in the 2015 PISA tests dissolve once the higher exclusion rate is taken into account.

Dagbladet chose to lead with "Norway is a school loser", while *VG* suggested Norwegian students were "this week's losers" (*VG*, 8th Dec 2001). The Norwegian researchers involved in PISA were surprised that finishing around the OECD average generated so much attention, though they also note that Clemet "underlined" the fact on several occasions (Kjæmsli, et al,. 2004, p.1; e.g. Clemet 2002, UFD, 2004). Indeed, Clemet, aided by her ministry and the press, can be understood as a domestic actor that mobilized the discursive resources provided by PISA's rankings to administer a status shock in Norwegian discourse.

Clemet and the government were certainly successful – arguably too successful for their own good – in framing PISA as crucial status competition. They set in motion a decade of what some would later refer to as PISA "hysteria" (Aftenposten, 6 Mar, 2014). Indeed, following Clemet's early cue, the treating PISA as a competition that Norway should expect to win became the dominant frame; one that embodied the grammar of status competition as the primary logic of legitimation for reform. The following rounds of PISA in 2003 and 2006 had not brought any solace to Norway (www.pisa.oecd.org), despite the introduction of reforms directly targeted at improving Norway's PISA performance (see below). Instead, each round wrought a new wave of consternation and calls for something to be done: better teacher training, more classroom-discipline, more resources, and/or learning from Finland (e.g Width, 2002 2 Feb 2002; Solveig 16 Jan 2008; Ramnefjell, 14 Feb 2002).[240] Particularly following the 2006 scores, when Norway's results in all three categories fell below the PISA average, the PISA results prompted an intense political debate about how to improve the Norwegian school system.[241] As an *Aftenposten* (6 Feb 2008) leader put it, "[t]here is broad political consensus that the performance of Norwegian school pupils is too poor compared to the results of pupils in other countries", however not about how to rectify it and who was to blame.

The left-side and the right-side coalitions disagreed about how best to improve PISA scores, however they did not contest the premise of using PISA position as both a measure of performance and a goal. As such, using PISA uncritically, as a reason to take action, these debates reproduced the rules of the competition and reified the value judgments of the PISA's

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[240] Leading Norwegian politicians and educators quite literally went to Finland to from their school system (reported in Ramnefjell, 14 Feb 2002; Ertesvåg Lynau (18. Jun .2002). Thanks to PISA, Finland had overnight gained the status of leader in education. Indeed, pre-PISA, few paid attention to Finland's education system and the Finns themselves were as surprised as anyone that they topped the first PISA rankings (Simola, 2005).
[241] The number of articles in the three newspapers covered peaked in 2007 and 2008 in the months following the publication of the 2006 scores (there is a one-year lag before results are published). See: www.pisa.oecd.org.

international education hierarchy. The use of PISA in this way had become so predictable that by 2007, education experts attempted to pre-empt the outcry by warning in the week leading up to the PISA's publication, that Norway must avoid "staring blindly at the results of the OECD-implemented PISA" (*Dagbladet*, 26 Nov 2007)

The policy documents that supported the governments' plans to reform go into more depth about the problems but they routinely used PISA's relative country-comparisons to illuminate and emphasize the problems they aim to address. As we saw, Clemet was keen to emphasize that Norway should aim for higher than the OECD average—itself a relative comparison that instantiates an international status hierarchy— but the policy documents also mobilise relative comparisons of the disaggregated result. For instance, the government policy document that contributed to the intellectual basis for the reforms, *Culture for Learning* (UFD, 2004, p.12*)*, stated that PISA shows Norway to be *"*one of the OECD countries with the *biggest* problems with unmotivated students and low working hours" (2004, p.12). A page later it notes that "Although a large group of students achieve good academic results in school - and 55 percent of Norwegian students who participated in PISA outperform the international OECD average - Norway is among the five countries with the *largest spread* in reading skills. (ibid, p.13) Surveying the press coverage and use of PISA by the government, it is clear that PISA served as a means of highlighting a problem in Norway's education system defined in terms of relative comparison to peers—i.e. not being best, or being below average. While critical voices existed in public discourse (see below), especially in the first decade of PISA tests, the dominant use of PISA among the press and the government was to identify relative international position as a problem and thus legitimate something to be done.

Legitimating Competing for Position

While Renshon (2017) suggests status dissatisfaction may trigger war as a means to rectify their low position, in the context of PISA, this would appear poorly suited to the task. However, the PISA results did enable and facilitate action: educational reform. There is little doubt that PISA has contributed to both the timing and substance of educational reforms in Norway. The PISA Norwegian representative estimated PISA to have been "highly influential" in on education in Norway (Breakspear, 2012). Meanwhile, the main government

sponsored research group – PISA+[242] –.charged with analysing PISA and guiding policy stated in 2004 that

> The PISA results from 2000 revealed some alarming weaknesses at the Norwegian school, and both school officials and politicians agreed that many of them were both necessary and possible to do something about. In all likelihood, *PISA* has played a significant role in both academic and educational policy in our country. (Kjærnsli, M., Lie, S., Olsen, R. V., & Turmo, A. 2004)[243]

As the education secretary at the time recounted in his book about the his time in office, the results of the PISA test "offered us flying start" and gave the government a "mandate" to push through education reforms (Bergesen 2006, p. 42). The creation of a New National Quality Assessment System in 2004 reflect closely PISA's "best practice" recommendations: introducing more country-wide standardized testing, which Norway had hitherto proven reluctant to do (see above).[244] Similarly, in 2006, the substance of the "Knowledge Elevation" reforms indicate a clear goal to improve PISA performance (Elstad and Sivesind, 2010; Kjærnsli et al, 2004; Sjøberg, 2014).[245] Elstad and Sivesind, (2010, p.14) argue that PISA has not only influenced Norway's education politics, but also Norway's education evaluation; they cite how questions from the PISA tests have become used in Norway's education. As Svein Sjøberg (2014, p.34–37), the education researcher summarises, the government "were liberating honest to emphasize" how they "let Pisa be the basis for almost every measure in their school policy" and given the "countless" references to PISA tests and OECD experts in parliamentary reports and school documents, it "does not require profound analysis to suggest they have had an enormous influence on policy making."

Moreover, both sides of Norwegian politics endorsed PISA as a basis for and goal of reforms. The new Red-Green government that took over in 2005, followed through with the "Knowledge Elevation" reforms that had been mooted under the previous government and continued to make PISA central to Norway's education policy (Elstad and Sivesind, 2010, p.23). Indeed, the new prime minister Jens Stoltenberg made PISA central to his new year's speech in 2008, telling Norway that having become "accustomed" to finishing top of country rankings, he had "got the message" from PISA (quoted in Skjeggestad, 5 Dec 2016). Not to

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[242] The PISA+ project was implemented on behalf of the Directorate of Education

[243] Kjærnsli and colleagues (2004, p. 18-20) suggest the following reforms were "highly likely" to have been introduced as a result of the PISA scores: the National tests (2003); Strategy for strengthening the science subjects (2002); National centers for reading, mathematics and science (2004); Reading stimulus measures (2003).

[244] Indeed, the creators of the new curriculum were explicitly given a "mandate" by Clemet to ensure the tests were directly informed by PISA (NOU, 2002, para, 1.9).

[245] The original Norwegian is "Kunnskapsløftet", which has a double meaning: knowledge promise and knowledge elevation.

be outdone, and an indication of the cross-party consensus about the significance of PISA, the leader of the opposition (and future Prime Minister) Erna Solberg in 2009 offered a public "guarantee" that her party would improve Norway's PISA performance if elected (Skjeggestad, 5 Dec 2016) As Sjøberg has noted, this constituted a shift from policy-making based upon the standards Norway set itself, to those set by international organisations:

> if we look at parliamentary reports and other school documents in the early 2000s, including with the red-green government [the new government that took over in 2005], there are not many references to the purpose paragraph [general principles supposed to guide the education policy]. Nor are there many references to the general part of the curriculum…Nor does the word formation or general education appear in recent Storting reports or NOUs about Norwegian schools. On the other hand, there are countless references to PISA, TIMSS and «OECD experts" (Sjøberg, 2014b, p.199)

In sum, during this first decade of PISA testing, there emerged a cross-party concern – some would say obsession – with PISA performance. This manifested itself in a series of reforms legitimated by reference to Norway's relative PISA position. In other words a cross-party acceptance emerged that the PISA education ranking's rules should also become Norway's: the OECD's education status competition had succeeded in overcoming national insulation, and inducing Norway to play their education game.[246]

The Stakes of the Competition: Prizes, Pride or Something Else?

Reviewing how PISA enabled the grammar of status competition to inform Norwegian policy also provides insight into what value was theorized to be at stake in Norway's education status competition. though it is not connected to any direct carrots or sticks, one might suspect that it was fears about future economic competitiveness are what drove the PISA shock. Yet, reviewing the public outcry across the time period little mention is made of the economic implications of scoring average among OECD countries on PISA.[247] In fact, quite the opposite, the main group that mentions this in the press are those who criticize PISA: they use the OECD's focus on economically useful skills as a reason why Norway *should not* pay so much attention (e.g. Johnson and Østerud, 3 Apr, 2002). To be sure, economic motivations provide a general overall motivation of Norway's education policy reforms during this period (UFD, 2004, 2002), however economic anxiety was definitely not the

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[246] Although it is not of central importance, according to Bergesen (2006, p.43) the perception that PISA offered a "scientific" basis for policy seems crucial for overcoming objections. (Bergesen 2006, p. 43)"

[247] No doubt in the background as PISA's critics have noted, there were economic considerations of global competition. However, there are direct economic rewards at stake in the manner of credit rating agencies, nor is there evidence that investors pay heed to PISA.

reason for the *public* outcry about PISA that constructed the demand and thus the possibility for reforms. Kristin Clemet's article in *VG*, illustrates this nicely, she does not mention economic concerns when she explains her mooted education reforms, but instead focuses on how Norway should expect to be best and thus strive to be best: "I am convinced that we are already "the best in the world in many areas (…) The question is how we can pull more students "upwards" so that even more can enjoy the very best". (Clemet, 17 Apr, 2002)

Indeed, what enabled the government to administer the shock was that that many in Norway *expected* to finish top. Before the first PISA in 2001, Norwegians tended to believe and expect their education system to be the best in the world (Baird et al., 2011; Østerud, 2016). This is fits with extant research into the distribution of PISA shock more broadly. Reviewing the distribution of PISA shocks as a whole, Martens and Niemann (2013) find no correlation between a country's rank in the PISA test and its level of reaction, noting that poor ranking in-itself is not sufficient to trigger a national education debate and reforms. Instead, they suggest that countries who held their education system in high esteem found even average results "shocking", meanwhile states with widely acknowledged problems in education did not suffer from a "PISA shock" (e.g the U.S). Martens and Niemann (2013) do not make the link to status: failing to meet expectations can be based upon a failure to meet an internally generated standard rather relative to peers. However, my status framework foregrounds the *relational* component of competition with others and allows us to explore the representations of prizes that were theorized to be at stake in this competition.

Indeed, the education discourse both in the press and policy documents indicates that unfavourable comparisons with Norway's Scandinavian peer group helped make the PISA shock reverberate. This fits with recent works in IR, which have drawn upon Frank (1985) to emphasize how "status concerns" are especially likely to emerge out of negative comparisons with "significant others" (Renshon, 2017; Røren 2019). In the context of Norway, it implies that the friendly "neighbourhood rivalry" with fellow Nordic countries would be the most salient (Røren, 2019): The PISA debate reflects this too. What stung was not only that Norway was merely average, but that it was ranked lower than its peers. For instance, Finland was frequently used in the school debate throughout the first decade of PISA as a model to envied and indeed mimicked (e.g. Width, 2 Feb 2002; Solveig, 16 Jan, 2008). However, these significant others were not only used because they are Norway's long-standing "sibling" rivals. The Norwegian government reports systematically use Nordic countries as a benchmark for comparison for scientific rational reasons. In the policy

documents Norway frequently refers to its Nordic neighbours as "natural" countries to compare themselves. The justification for comparison rests upon the 200-year old premise that it makes most sense to compare oneself with similar countries: because the Nordic countries share a similar culture, a similar "Nordic economic model" and are relatively wealthy, the government argued that relative comparisons make sense because Norway can plausibly expect to perform at least as well as these countries.

My analysis cannot confirm – if any could – what the motivation was for the outcry, however the emotional register of much of the discourse was consistent with SIT: that Norwegian's self-esteem was on the line. For instance, Bergeson (2006, p.41) claimed the results were a "national humiliation". However, in addition to national pride and the background economic rationale, I argue that dominant line of reasoning the government emphasised when legitimating their policy reforms was neither economic concerns nor dependent upon "intrinsic" concerns for Norway's status. Instead, the expectation that Norway should perform better on PISA was based upon a relative comparison of spending on education. Hence, at the first press conference, Clemet would argue that:

> We are at the top of the OECD when it comes to the use of resources at school, our education level is high and we are a rich country. Therefore, we should have higher ambitions than average. We owe that to our children (quoted in Ramnefjell, 5 Dec 2001)

The policy documents that underpinned the calls for reform reproduce this Clemet's logic. For instance, the *Culture for Learning* document that discussing the PISA results and what to do about them explained, the reform was necessary because PISA showed that Norway was not getting "value for money" (UFD, 2004; see also Bergeson, 2006 p.40-46). Meanwhile, the PISA+ team, which led government sponsored research about how to respond to PISA, also reproduced the value for money discourse:

> The problematic findings that gained focus through the PISA results are assessed from an international perspective and on the basis of national priorities, attention and resource allocation. They can be summarized as follows: 1. Around or below average performance in all areas (math, science and reading) relative to the OECD, and a decline from 2000 to 2003. Based on strong focus and high resource use in schools, politicians and the general population consider this not satisfactory (Klette, et al, 2008,p.2-3)

Embedded within this "value for money" discourse is the assumption that PISA provides an objective and commonsensical means of assessing value: Relative position in the PISA

rankings is compared with relative spending on education.[248] The value judgements that inform PISA's rules become reified as a commonsensical means of assessing the "value" provided by the school system.[249] In other words, the combination new information based upon a new mode of comparison – ranking in PISA's maths, literacy and science tests – made possible a new measure of education performance, one that seemed to suggest Norway did not excel. Given that Norway more generally holds the quality of its public good provision in high regard, the representation of Norway as not only "mediocre" (middelmådig) but inefficient, generated additional salience within the PISA-Clemet-inspired education debate. What this value for money argument occluded, of course, was how there were many alternative means of assessing the value of education than PISA. Indeed, whether it was economic value of education, or more broadly defined goals, PISA was far from the only option, nor as many pointed out, an unproblematic one (see below, also Singer & Braun, 2018).

The value for money discourse around PISA thus illustrates a *via media* explanation for why a state may compete in an international status competition. PISA's relative ranking became the primary barometer through which citizens' judged the state's public good provision in education, and thus the legitimacy of the government. Thus, quite besides external pride or privileges; performance in an international status affects a government's and the state's legitimacy.

Instrumentalizing Status for Other Ends: Government and Press

Finally, before moving on to the critical discourse, this analysis begs the question: why was the government so willing to defer authority for the evaluation of Norwegian education to the OECD, given it meant amplifying negative status comparisons? The advantage of disaggregating the state in analysis is that it highlights how different domestic groups may not have equal incentives to maintain positive international comparisons. Indeed, the new Conservative party in office ("Høyre") was not responsible for the previous education reforms

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The value for money discourse was combined with argument that because PISA results were not closely correlated with spending, improvements could be made without spending more money (see Bergeson 2006 for an extended discussion of this debate). Although it is not central to this chapter, it is worth noting that there are serious problems with this argument. Indeed, lurking variables abound that are often omitted: for instance, South Korea is often held up as an example of a country that gets value for money, yet citizens spends the equivalent of 2.5% of GDP on private tutoring on top of the 3.6% spent by the government (Singer & Braun, 2018, p.39)

[249] This discourse is also reflected in recent qualitative research into how school leaders perceive PISA (Aursand, 2018, p. 66)

and thus had little legitimacy resting upon schools' international performance. In fact, PISA was a boon to the government as they could use PISA as a stick to beat their major rival (Arbeiderpartiet[250]). Moreover, Høyre had long wanted to introduce more accountability into the system; PISA provided them with that opportunity and they embraced it even as it enabled unfavourable international comparisons to generate salience. This would explain why not only did the government not try to insulate country from PISA's unfavourable theory of the international education hierarchy, but they actively sought to amplify it. (see Clemet's Olympic quote above). However, as we saw, once the government had framed PISA and legitimated its use, the press accepted the legitimacy of the PISA rankings and began reproducing the rules of the competition independent of the government's actions. Thus, in the first decade of the 21st century, both sides of the political spectrum faced domestic incentives to be seen to compete for position in the PISA rankings.

At least in the first decade then, the PISA rankings enabled the logic of status competition to manifest within Norwegian education policy-making. This first decade of PISA saw Norway embroiled in a "race to the top" (Bieber and Martens, 2011,p. 103) whereby consecutive governments undertook policies specifically designed to compete in the OECD defined education game. Indeed, the way PISA rankings engender status concerns could be understood to constitute a peculiar type of "external shock" whereby external shocks open a "window" for government actors to undertake large scale reform (Kingdon, 1995). The interesting thing about PISA, and other CPIs, is that the window they open may stay open by virtue of the way they *package* PISA test knowledge: in an iterative ranking. As noted above, one can improve one's performance in absolute terms and still move down a ranking if the other competitors improve by more. Notwithstanding an unprecedented improvement, it might have seemed like the PISA rankings could theoretically provide the discursive resources to be used to legitimize education reforms for as long as Norway does not reach the summit.

Rebellion, Reflexivity and Escaping Status Competition

Norway's initial response to PISA seems like an open and shut case of rankings overcoming national insulation, successfully imposing a foreign theory by which to make international comparisons, and thus inspiring status competition in the policy field (education). So far we

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[250] A centre left or social democratic party, which has been historically the biggest party in Norwegian politics.

have concentrated upon one type of reactivity the PISA rankings fermented: status concerns and subsequent competitive measures whereby Norway responded to the rankings by striving to improve its performance. However, a second more reflexive and critical response to the rankings emerged and become more pronounced throughout the period (2001-2019). Indeed, zooming in on the domestic response to PISA *across time*, we can also see how several groups in Norway sought, eventually with some success, to undermine theory of the international education hierarchy found in PISA and thus mitigate and event escape the status competition that it had enabled and encouraged.

Taking a longer lens and looking a more closely at the response shows how national ontologies can emerge anew within domestic societies. As noted above, governments and citizens have incentives to avoid negative comparisons with out-groups. In Norway this is illustrated by how the education sector became demoralized by the PISA shock (Østerud and Johnson, 3 Apr, 2002). Indeed, one of the protagonists among the government who led the call reform in PISA's wake, admitted that by the second round of results they deliberately softened the comparisons they used to refer to refer Norway's PISA scores (Bergesen, 2006, p. 47): instead of using "mediocre "to describe the Norway's performance they began to use "middling good".[251] Moreover, although they were minority voice in the early years PISA, education academics fought back in several op-eds in national newspapers (e.g. Johnson and Østerud, 3 Apr, 2002; Sjøberg, 17 Dec, 2007; Fretland, 07 Dec, 2007) while resistance to PISA's influence in Norway emerged in Norwegian academic fora. For instance, in a well-cited article titled "PISA Syndrome", Svein Sjøberg (2014, p.36) takes aim at the very premise of making inter-state comparisons using relative rankings, arguing that statistically insignificant changes in position took on political potency in Norwegian politics they scarcely warrant. Meanwhile, an edited volume titled *PISA: The Truth About School?* was published in 2010, in which leading Norwegian education experts directly questioned PISA's out-sized influence on Norwegian education policy. As one chapter put "very many ⌈Norwegian researchers⌉ seem to have accepted PISA's quality judgment without discussing the durability of the conclusions. The fact that there is now a Norwegian book that does not take all Pisa's conclusions for granted is thus an important event" (Langfeldt and Birkeland, 2010, p.96).

[251] This sounds strange in English but makes more sense in Norwegian. I am translating here "Middelmådige" and "middels god".

Crucially, the substance of many of these critiques constitute a rejection of the PISA's theory of the international education status hierarchy. First of all, several academics questioned the validity of the tests based upon the quality of the tests themselves. For instance, a group of natural scientists. who were asked by NRK[252] to assess the PISA tests, were scathing. For instance, Professor Sissel Rogne suggested it "must be exceptionally difficult to test a student's knowledge based on such a test". Meanwhile another reported that they found the tests "messy, inconsistent and confusing" and worried that "it is being given so much weight in Norway" (Cited in Fretland, 07 Dec 2007). Writing the following week, Svein Sjøberg (17 Dec 2007) argued that Norwegian (and Swedish and Danish) students would be especially unlikely to be "patient enough to do their best and fight through these long, strange and linguistically awkward tests" that offered no clear value to their studies or feedback. This sort of argument functions to delegitimise PISA's international hierarchy and insulate Norway from negative international comparisons. However, rather than merely reject PISA's tests, several critics explicitly posit an alternative theory of educational performance, one more favourable to Norway. For instance, Jan Johnson and Per Østerud (3 Apr 2002) reflect a common argument found among educators: that the Norwegian education system prioritizes other qualities that are "hardly measured" in PISA such as encouraging students to "develop tolerance for other ethnic groups" and "create an understanding of democracy and individual rights". Thus they suggest Norwegian school's likely perform better in a "number of places that are not reflected in the PISA survey's ranking list."[253] Along similar lines, some critics emphasized that PISA's priorities reflect the narrow priorities of the OECD rather than the broader principles Norwegians might want their education to be based upon (e.g. Sjøberg 17 Dec 2007; Clausen, 02 Jan 2010). Rather than an entirely new theory, this argument is better seen as a re-iteration of the Scandinavian exceptionalism discourse predating PISA.

This scepticism towards PISA eventually spread to the press and political parties. Indeed, the "PISA shock" itself, has reflexively become re-constituted in the last decade as a lesson from

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[252] NRK stands for Norsk rikskringkasting (Norwegina Broadcasting Corporation). Basically, it is Norway's version of the BBC

[253] Qualitative research based upon school leaders' understanding of PISA, undertaken in 2015, suggest these views are also found at the school level. As Leah Aursand (2018, p.66) reports, "Several interviewees mentioned feeling that PISA's results do not accurately reflect the values behind a country's education system." The example the researcher quotes reflects Johnson and Østerud argument: "Maybe we can tolerate that we don't come out on top in these tests because we have made other choices about what we think is important to spend time on in school—raising students socially, building democratic skills, and becoming a critically thinking person"

history about the folly of paying too much heed to the PISA results. While the critical discourse is not yet dominant among the national daily newspapers,[254] the critical discourse is increasingly found in the mainstream commentary (beyond op-eds written by academics). For instance, reflecting on Norway's best results since PISA began,[255] regular *Aftenposten* columnist Helene Skjeggestad was less than euphoric. In an article titled, 15 Years with the Test that Shows What you Want It to Show", Skjeggestad looks back upon Norway's "PISA shock", and notes how PISA had been primarily been used to score cheap political points and as blunt rhetorical instrument for legitimating reforms (Skjeggestad, 5 Dec 2016).[256] Moreover, the leader in *Aftenposten* reflecting upon the 2015 PISA scores is less critical, but notably it prefaces its positive response by noting that Norwegians are "allowed to enjoy [the results], even if neither PISA or the TIMSS survey, which was presented last week, tells the whole truth about Norwegian school."

This critical reflexivity about the value of competing in PISA is well illustrated by how Clemet's Olympic metaphor has become emblematic for PISA's opponents. Indeed, the Olympics analogy she used in 2001, has now been re-constituted as means of questioning the use and abuse of PISA rankings. For instance, "PISA is not the Olympics" runs one *Aftenposten* headline, while the professor of education and long-term PISA critic, Svein Sjøberg has published several op-eds quoting Clemet to highlight the pathological influence of PISA on Norway's schools and to question sense of competing (e.g. Sjøberg, 5 Sep 2014; Sjøberg, 11 Apr, 2014). Moreover, the re-constitution of Clemet's metaphor as an attack upon competing in PISA has also been mobilised by left-side political parties. For instance, the shadow education minister of the largest opposition party, wielded Clemet's words in an op-ed in *Dagbladet*, criticising the use of PISA in Norwegian education policy. Titled "Testing is the wrong medicine", Torstein Tvedt Solberg (Jan 20, 2020) sarcastically suggests that the education minister might like to say the results of the 2018 PISA tests were

> disappointing - like coming home from the Winter Olympics without a single medal - but he couldn't, because it is the Right who is responsible for these numbers. For too long, the right has been defined too much by school policy in Norway, and they have used the PISA figures to whip up a turmoil for their own political gain.

Solberg goes onto to declare that "PISA has never told the whole truth about Norwegian schools". It is important to note that Solberg belongs to the same political party –

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[254] The response by *VG* and *Dagbladet* to the 2016 results take a relatively uncritical line celebrating Norway's improvement (E.g. *Dagbladet*, 7 Dec 2016; 7 Dec *VG*, 2016) .

[255] Norway positioned above the OECD average in maths, literacy and science in the same year for the first time.

[256] See also Skjeggestad (12 Dec, 2016)

Arbeiderpartiet— whose previous leader declared back in 2008 that the PISA results were unacceptable and publicly prioritized improving Norway's position.

Crucially, the opposition to PISA among education academics and teachers – and the logic of their opposition – has now spread to mainstream politics. In 2016 two parties of the left-side that had hitherto been in the government that made rising in PISA a priority, made it their official policy to support opting out of PISA. Their reasoning reflects a desire to reassert the primacy of a nationalist ontology for assessing their educational performance. Citing the support of the teachers union, The Socialist Left party – which held the education ministerial post in government between 2005 and 2013—now argues that PISA's focus does not offer a comprehensive picture of the quality of schools and as such, competing on PISA's terms had "harmed" Norwegian education (quoted in abcnyheter.no, 20 Oct 2016; see also Kruger, 03 Dec 2019). While in 2013, SV's education spokesmen still proclaimed that "PISA results are important" (quoted in Brønmo, 4 Dec, 2013) their party working program in 2020 now promises to "get PISA out of schools" (Socialist Left Party, N.D). Meanwhile, reasserting Norway's earlier dominant nationalist ontology, the education spokesperson for the Centre Party has argued that "Norway must have the balls [sic], to rely on ourselves and the school we have developed over many years. Norwegian students are good in other areas, such as understanding democracy" (quoted in Kruger, 3 Dec 2019; see also Sandvik, Grønli, Myklebust, 19 Oct, 2016). Their 2017 election manifesto, promises to "terminate Norway's participation in PISA" (The Centre Party, 2017, p.66). While these parties are currently not in government, collectively anti-PISA parties stand at around 30% in polls at the time of writing (*Dagbladet*, 15 Jan 2020) meanwhile their coalition partner, Arbeiderpartiet have become increasingly ambivalent towards PISA (e.g. Solberg, 2020). Indeed, going by the polls, it is very likely that next government will contain a majority in the coalition that wish to leave PISA.

The eventual spread of dissent to the political class indicates that competing in PISA is not an all or nothing decision: the process of competing ran parallel to critical reflexivity about value of the competition itself. This critical discourse began in academia and among teachers, but has in the last 5 years emerged in mainstream politics. Moreover, the substance of this discourse reflects the *reassertion* of nationalist ontology hitherto privileged in the pre-PISA era: the assertion of an alternative value system upon which to make international comparisons. This is consistent with the argument that citizens face incentives to maintain a theory of international status that is favourable to themselves. To be sure, prior research has

suggested that states may reject – in a discrete one off act – rankings that they score poorly in. However, my approach has allowed me to highlight the dynamic aspect: how contestation of an international hierarchy may emerge and strengthen over time and undermine the competition that a state had hitherto accepted. Relatedly, tracing the emergence of this anti-PISA discourse shows that this cannot be said to be a strategic state led enterprise, but a civil society driven one (in this case by academics and teachers). This would suggest that status scholars should avoid treating domestic actors as a homogenous a group that strives to maximize positive status comparisons: some groups – including governments under some circumstances—can and often do have interests that override the incentives to maintain positive international status comparisons.

Conclusion: A Healthy Competition?

Without belabouring the obvious, how to govern sovereign states in "anarchy" is a central problematic in international relations and International Relations respectively. Maybe the promise of institutions is false, but whatever way one cuts it, international organizations and the global governance initiatives they manifest, usually feature in the problem, answer and/or the solution. Stimulating status competition via rankings offer one novel solution to overcoming the challenge of governance under anarchy. At a high level of abstraction, this chapter can be seen as an additional case of how and why a country responds to a CPI: because their governments' and citizens decide to pursue status in the field defined by the ranking. Thus, it adds empirical ballast to Ann Towns and Rumelili's (2017) theorization of how relative international hierarchies exert social pressure, as well as Kelley and Simmons'(2015;2019) growing body of work on how rankings influence their targets.

However, juxtaposing the findings with prior research reveals that the chapter make least three theoretical contributions to status research. First, the chapter showcases the value of treating status as legitimation rather than motivation: it highlights how the grammar of status can be mobilised to achieve outcomes that are conventionally rational: Norway introducing national testing. This runs against conventional (rationalist) wisdom whereby seeking status is associated with inefficiency and sometimes recklessness (E.g. Gilady, 2018). This analytical move thus significantly expands the range of activities that status lens can help account for beyond the materially "irrational". Second, my theorization of international status hierarchies as an ongoing discursive achievement enabled me to illustrate not only how status competition can be encouraged by CPIs, but also illustrates how these competitive

processes can be successfully contested and undermined at the domestic level. I would suggest that this is one avenue IR's status research agenda would do well to pursue. Rather than just concentrating on international measures of "accommodation" to mitigate status competition (e.g. Larson and Shevchenko, 2010), it is surely also worth exploring how domestic resistance can undermine the domestic consent to competing in an international hierarchy. Finally, the chapter illuminated a "third way" of how status can inform policy that does not rely on either external incentives or the assumption of intrinsic psychological rewards: by redefining *legitimate* public policy performance in terms of a relative international hierarchy.

Normative Implications

One reading of the above theorization and analysis would be that—contra the conventional wisdom in IR—*status* competition might sometimes be healthy. Historically, status seeking is normally associated with waste and even war for instance, the "Veblen Effect" describes how a concern for symbolic (status) utility rather than primary utility directs resources towards conspicuous consumption. This leads to overconsumption of battleships and underconsuption of less conspicuous but otherwise more efficient policies like submarines or public goods (Gilady, 2018). If one accepts that rankings can operate as status competition conduits and make the hitherto private social qualities public and comparable, then this may offer a corrective to distortion created by Veblen effects.

Yet, from democratic perspective, allowing international organisations to set the rules of the game and thus the norms for public spending is also highly problematic. As the critical rankings literature has illuminated, rankings embody value judgements that become hidden and thus insulated from democratic politics. Yet, as the analysis showed, this depoliticisation is not final: the subjects of the rankings may learn to question the politics embodied in the methodology. Indeed, reactivity to rankings can operate in divergent directions. The iterative feedback back loop theorized as status competition can simultaneously engender a critical reflexivity that questions the legitimacy and credibility of the ranking and thus undermine the legitimacy of the hierarchy and thus the pressure to compete. Indeed, this *tentative* finding suggests international rankings may *not* offer a never-ending discursive resource for legitimating policy reform, but can lose salience as the domestic audience reflects upon its meaning and implications (e.g. for democracy). This is important because critical rankings research has hitherto provided a comprehensive taxonomy of pathologies associated with CPIs (See Beaumont and Towns 2019 for a review), without theorizing or even investigating

instances of resistance. This chapter provides both an analytical framework for highlighting such resistance as well as an empirical illustration of how it can occur in practice.

Chapter VI

Symmetry Over Strategy:
How Status Suckered the Superpowers at SALT

The real issue is the impact what we agree on will have on the decision-makers in Washington and the decision-makers in Moscow. Our view of our advantages or disadvantages will determine whether we can pursue an aggressive or timid foreign policy. The same will be true for the Soviets. If we all recognize we are not at a substantial disadvantage as the Soviets, we have great potential and power.

President Nixon March 8, 1973: NSC Meeting

Introduction

It was not only peaceniks who argued the Cold War nuclear arms-race was mad. A litany of realist luminaries and "cold warriors" argued that once both sides acquired a second strike capability by the late 1970s, striving for nuclear superiority became futile. Even during his time as Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger acknowledged that "when each side has thousands of launchers and many more warheads, a decisive or politically significant margin of superiority is out of reach".[257] Acquiring further weapons, beyond this capacity would be redundant, as Winston Churchill is reported to have remarked, "Why make the rubble bounce?"[258] Moreover, the potential for nuclear weapons to help states escape the security dilemma, was recognised early in the nuclear era and found considerable support in policy circles and academia (Freedman, 1989). As early as 1946, Bernard Brodie's *The Absolute Weapon* made the case that because of nuclear weapons' sheer destructive capacity, the requirement to pay attention to relative gains of one's adversary would cease. The late Kenneth Waltz (1981, p.25) put it more bluntly, "The logic of deterrence eliminates incentives for strategic arms racing".[259] Following this logic, the final twenty years of the Cold War nuclear arms race—the Soviet Union and the US raced to around 40,000 operative nuclear weapons apiece by the 1980s— become a significant puzzle, even for those who endorse nuclear deterrence. For instance, Charles Glaser (1994, p.87) suggests: "The nuclear arms race should have ground to a halt and the full spectrum of the most threatening nuclear forces should have been limited either by arms control agreements or unilaterally" as such it "must be explained by other theories." While various domestic and psychological theories have been proffered to explain this "sub-optimal" outcome, as recently as 2018 Matt Kroenig suggested that the Cold War nuclear arms race remains the longest standing, and most significant puzzle of nuclear research.[260]

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[257] Henry Kissinger, quoted in the *New York Times* (Reston, 31 Mar 1976)

[258] Churchill is originally used this line in reference to the allied bombing during the second world war, however James Reston reported that Churchill used the expression to refer to the folly of nuclear arms racing: For the first reporting of this exact term see: Reston (31 Jan 1969) Reston seemed especially fond of this line, and used it repeatedly in his reporting on US nuclear policy.

[259] It should be noted that Waltz (1981, p.25-26) then glossed over the puzzling disjuncture between theory and practice this claim produces: "This should be easier for lesser nuclear states to understand than it has been for the US and the USSR."

[260] The solution that Kroenig (2018) posits that nuclear superiority offers advantages in crisis has been suffered comprehensive criticism from Charles Glaser (2019 and several others in a H-Diplo roundtable (2019). I will not dwell on Kroenig here because his approach is an explicitly" outsiders" take, which seeks to retrospectively deduct a why the policy was rational, without concern for the meaning of the people involved. He has deduced a model that that can retrospectively make sense of the arms race based upon a fixed mode of rationality, I have investigated how the policy-makers involved legitimated their policy at the time.

While interest in US and Russian nuclear strategy dwindled in the 1990s as security studies broadened and nuclear proliferation took centre stage (Green & Long, 2017), with the recent cooling of American-Russian relations, the Cold War nuclear arms race seems worryingly relevant again. Indeed, *The New Yorker* recently noted that "many Russian and American policy experts no longer hesitate to use phrases like "the second Cold War" (Niemann, 6 Mar, 2017), meanwhile the EU has warned about a fresh round of Russo-American nuclear arms racing following Trump's decision to withdraw from the The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (Borger, 23 Oct, 2018). Given this context, the Cold War nuclear competition seems like a salient case to revisit. Moreover, if status concerns really are as ubiquitous in international relations as status research suggests, the Cold War arms race would seem like a crucial case. While some status scholars have argued that military policy is a hard-case for status theory (Pu and Schweller, 2014), I do not aver. After all, nuclear weapons have long been considered to be a major, if not the major, status symbol in international society[261] (O'Neill, 2006). Further, if one extends the logic of deterrence to its logical conclusion, then states armed with survivable nuclear weapons—the so called "ultimate deterrent"[262]— should have plenty of leeway to pursue other priorities with their arms acquisitions without fear of being "selected out" of the system. Given these grounds, it is not only curious that status research has hitherto had little to say about the cold war nuclear arms race, but crucial that it shows it can.[263] This chapter tackles the post-mad nuclear puzzle by investigating how status concerns affected the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the Soviet Union and the United States that took place between 1969 and 1979.[264] My central methodological gambit is that the SALT preparations negotiations offer an excellent window into the social value of nuclear arms during the Post-MAD period of Cold War, and as such, can offer leverage on whether and how status concerns affected the arms control process and the nuclear arms race in general.

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[261] Lilach Gilardy (2018) theorizes that good status symbols should be costly, difficult, highly visible and exclusive. In this respect, nuclear weapons make near ideal status symbols. Moreover, across the course of international society's development war waging and the capability to wage war have been the primary markers of status for great powers (Neumann, 2008; Renshon, 2016)

[262] Many scholars have used this claims, some notable examples include John Mearsheimer (1984), Kenneth Waltz, (2012), Lawrence Freedman, (1975).

[263] I will discuss those few that do later in the chapter.

[264] Why focus on SALT and post-MAD world? While the early cold war arms race (1945-1960s) can also be understood as a status competition it is not especially puzzling that the arms race dynamic ensued the way it did. It is not difficult to understand why a discourse prioritising relative numerical position became an objective, given each sides mutual vulnerability in the early nuclear period (1950-1960) It is thus the post-MAD policy that puzzles scholars.

Moreover, the SALT process constitutes an empirical puzzle in its own right. SALT was premised upon the idea the superpowers shared an interest in reducing the risk of nuclear war by implementing more stable force structures and reducing the costs of strategic arms racing that would leave neither side safer, only poorer. As such, SALT was premised on arms *control* rather than disarmament. Rather than strive to remove nuclear weapons from the world, arms controllers strove to manage the risk of the nuclear era.[265] The SALT processes spanned a decade and three presidencies (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter's[266]) and initially seemed successful. "SALT I" led to the signing and ratification in 1972 of the ABM treaty, which limited each side to two anti-ballistic missile (ABM) sites a piece,[267] and the "Interim Agreement", which froze for five years the level of submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and land based intercontinental ballistic missiles ICBMs at 1972 levels.[268] The SALT II process would eventually lead the SALT Treaty,[269] which limited both sides to 2250 strategic nuclear missiles, and 1320 missiles equipped with multiple re-entry vehicles (MIRVs).[270] However, the SALT II treaty took over 6 years and three US presidents to negotiate and while it was eventually signed 1979, it would never reach the Senate for ratification.[271] The difficulty of SALT II is thus as a sub-puzzle of the post-mad nuclear era. Spanning the decade in which destruction had become mutually assured, the SALT talks should have proven quite straightforward according to the logic of Glaser, Jervis, and Waltz. After all, why would it prove difficult to limit redundant weapons? Instead, the talks were laborious, rapt with contention about relative gains, and especially SALT II, scarcely successful in limiting strategic arms.

To answer this question, and shed light on the broader puzzle of the post-mad nuclear arms race, I focus on the process through which the *US* SALT strategy was legitimated. While a body of research has already convincingly suggested that status concerns played a significant role in driving Russian/Soviet nuclear policies (Ringmar, 2002; Neumann, 2008; Götz, 2018;

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[265] There has long been frequent conflation between the two in practice, which is one reason why anti-nuclear activists have historically been disappointed with the fruits of arms control.

[266] Arguably one could include Lyndon Johnson in this list. His administration tried to initiate arms control with a letter in 1967, however he was rebuffed by the Soviets (Brands, 2006).

[267] The full title: Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM treaty)

[268] The full name of the treaty was: Interim Agreement Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Certain Measures With Respect to the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms

[269] Full name: Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (SALT II).

[270] MIRVs enabled multiple warheads to be launched from the same missile and hit independent targets. The US developed them in the late 1960s.

[271] The administration cancelled the vote following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Larson and Shevchenko, 2003), the US has been largely neglected by IR status scholarship.[272] To be sure, prima facie, status seems likely to be implicated in SALT: nuclear weapons are arguably international society's most potent status symbols (O'Neil, 2006), while status *competitions* imply intense concern for relative gains (see chapter 3, and Wohlforth, 2009). Yet, deducing status motivations from outcomes – depends upon a universalist conception of rationality, which is especially problematic in this case because different modes of rationality point to the same outcome. Indeed, among the "rational world of defence intellectuals" (Cohn, 1987) some called for nuclear policies that cut against the rationality of Waltz, Glaser, and Jervis, and promoted policies striving for superiority in number of nuclear weapons, even after MAD had been established (e.g. Gray, 1979). Therefore, to ascertain whether and how status concerns (or other goals) shaped the US SALT strategy, I conduct a longitudinal analyse of the archives of SALT I & II top-level security meetings.[273] Using the grammar of status competition as a lens, the goal is to ascertain whether and how representations of international status were used to (de)legitimate particular SALT negotiating positions. Rather than a-priori assuming one particular approach to nuclear policy is rational,[274] this involves asking how one nuclear narrative and the rationality it embodied overcome the others. How did the government and members of the bureaucracies involved represent their SALT policy as legitimate and desirable? How was the social value and costs associated with nuclear weapons theorized in these legitimation processes? Here I will pay special attention to the process of how the "rules of the game"— the criteria of the nuclear power hierarchies— were represented, contested, and wielded to legitimate particular policies and delegitimize others.

The central argument of this chapter is that the US's SALT strategy was substantially hindered by consecutive administrations expectations about how the agreements would affect domestic and international audiences' perceptions of the US's status in the nuclear

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[272] With some notable exceptions we will return to later: Wohlforth (2009), Lake (2013) Glaser, (2018)

[273] This chapter draws archives of recently declassified archives providing minutes and summaries of top level security meetings (e.g. National Security Council, Verification Panel), memorandum, and policy papers pertaining to SALT I and SALT II. These are available online at Office of the Historian. This includes more than 1000 documents totalling more than 3000 pages. Beyond this, I have also conducted an analysis of the public discourse via the archives of the *NYT* and *Foreign Affairs*, as well as selected other contemporary sources that emerged via secondary reading.

[274] Indeed, my concern with the meaning for the actors involved sets me apart from the vast number of game theoretical modelling that was undertaken during the 1970s 80s and 90s, to explain arms races. As Tal (2017 ,p.2) notes, although the strategic studies scholarship is vast it does "not use primary sources, that is archival documents, upon which they base their discussion on the subject". Although I share with Tal a concern with SALT, his is a historians account that above all strives to interpret motivations as well as bureaucratic explanations. Nonetheless, his research overlaps in part and was useful to triangulate with my findings.

competition. Reviewing the top-level SALT preparations and negotiations, reveals how concerns about how domestic and international audiences would respond to numerical inequality were used as *the* primary means of legitimating an insistence upon relative gains. I show how this prioritisation of international status both slowed down the negotiations, and came at the cost of pursuing other stated military priorities. Moreover, tracing the frontstage (public) and backstage (private) discourse, reveals how the process of arms control itself saw the emergence, contestation and solidification of the criteria that constituted the status hierarchy at play in SALT, and thus established the rules of how the status competition would be judged domestically. Specifically, I show how the process of debating SALT I domestically produced and reified a particular mode of evaluating the nuclear arms race – in terms of total number of nuclear launchers – that structured SALT II negotiations despite the key bureaucracies explicitly doubting its strategic sense. Finally, I argue that the process of conducting highly public bilateral arms control negotiations, by facilitating inter-subjective agreement about the criteria through which nuclear forces should be judged and publicising the agreement, intensified the social stakes involved in arms control and helped constitute SALT as a focal point for the broader superpower status competition.

Outline of Chapter

Section one elaborates the theoretical puzzle of the Cold War arms-race and in the process sketches the context to the SALT negotiations. Drawing on "soft" game theory, it takes Charles Glaser's (1994) argument to its logical conclusion: Not only should the prisoner's dilemma of the nuclear arms-race dissipate following the establishment of MAD, but it should have inverted: the superpowers should have had an interest in the other side wasting money on guns, rather than investing in butter. This crystalizes the puzzle that section two argues my status approach is well placed to solve. By training our analytical gaze beyond considerations of nuclear deterrence, my framework can illuminate whether and how other social prizes and punishments—theorized to be at stake in the negotiations—informed the US's negotiation positions during SALT I & II. Given the nuclear arms race is such a well-known and significant puzzle, these sections also elaborate in more depth than the other chapters how my status approach relates to alternative explanations for the arms race. Finally, section three puts the framework to work and traces how the US positions on SALT were contested and formed and how this affected the SALT negotiations.

The Nuclear Era: Security, Status & the Prisoner's Dilemma

The following section divides the cold war arms race into two periods: pre-and post MAD, and uses soft game theory as a heuristic tool to crystalize why the former period fits realist expectations and why the latter does not. To understand why the post 1970s arms race is normally considered a puzzle it is necessary sketch the standard Herzian formulation of the security dilemma, why it implies prioritising relative power, and why nuclear deterrence is expected to negate this pressure.[275] Without belabouring the obvious, realists argue that to guarantee security under anarchy states must rely on themselves.[276] Uncertainty about the others' intentions requires states to acquire the means of defending themselves. However, defensive capabilities are difficult to distinguish from offensive capabilities. As such, states that arm themselves merely to defend themselves may inadvertently threaten those around them, triggering others to arm themselves in response, which may in turn appear threatening, prompting a counter response. The tragedy is that this arms race "spiral" can occur even when the states involved have only benign intentions. This so called tragedy is compounded by uncertainty about how much force a state requires to defend itself. As George Simmel noted, 'the most effective presupposition for preventing struggle" would be "the exact knowledge of the comparative strength of the two parties" (cited in Waltz, 1981p. 7). Indeed, prior to the nuclear era, the proxies for assessing an adversary's relative power left much to the imagination. War waging capability depends upon all types of intangibles that are resistant to accurate measurement and comparison. As such, miscalculation and overconfidence abounds in the historical record of inter-state war.

Nuclear weapons by themselves are not expected to mitigate this predicament. A nuclear deterrent requires "possession of sufficient nuclear capabilities to assure one's relevant adversaries of their destruction in the event of war" (De Mesquita and Riker, 1982,p. 289) and thus deter the adversary from aggressive actions they might otherwise undertake. Nuclear weapons make near-ideal deterrents according to Waltz (1981,p. 4) because "They make the cost of war seem frighteningly high and thus discourage states from starting any wars that might lead to the use of such weapons". Yet, just possessing nuclear weapons does not automatically alleviate the pressure to compete for relative firepower. Before a second strike capability is assured, in the world of hyper-rational defence intellectuals, a merciless foe may be tempted to undertake a preventative "bolt from the blue" to destroy the other's

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[275] See: Herz (1950)
[276] Mearsheimer, (2001), Glaser (1994) Waltz (1979), Jervis (2001)

forces, lest the adversary get there first (Wohlstetter, 1958, p.153-154). Although both sides would prefer not to build new weapons in order to save money, a rational risk averse state should match or exceed their opponent in numbers lest they risk falling prey to a first strike attack and annihilation. In a pre-MIRV world, whereby one missile equals one warhead, it is theoretically logical to try to match and exceed one's opponent in aggregate number of missiles. Therefore, judging one's force size by reference to one's enemies' makes sense, even if it may lead to an arms spiral (see also Glaser, 2000). Thus, the 1950s and 1960s situation still seems well-explained by the security dilemma.

Indeed, the "missile gap" furore during the 1950s provides a good example of how vulnerability, uncertainty, and poor information, can inflame an arms race. Here, poor quality intelligence combined with taking Soviet boasts at face value, led to the US overestimating the rate of missile production in the Soviet Union. The US subsequently began crash-building ICBMs in the late 1950s in order to stop a "missile gap" from emerging in the 1960s that some in the military claimed would threaten deterrence. (Linklider 1970, p.614). Yet, the impending "missile gap" transpired to be "illusory" (Treverton, 1989, p115): American intelligence estimates had dramatically exaggerated the Soviet build-up, leaving the US with a large missile gap in their favour (Ibid; see also Norris and Cochrane, 1997). In response, the Soviets launched their own crash program. This period of the Soviet-US competition corresponds to the classic action-reaction cycle theory of arms races in general and because of the centrality of poor intelligence, Glaser's Defensive Realist Theory of arms races in particular. Indeed, because neither side had an *assured* second strike capability, the (theoretical) potential for their nuclear weapons to mitigate the pressure to arms race (Jervis, 1979; Waltz, 1981), had not been realised.

Post-MAD World

Yet, by the 1970s following several technological advances, defensive realists argue that the uncertainty around relative power should have become moot and thus the pressure to compete for position in number of nuclear weapons curtailed (Waltz, 1981, Jervis, 1978, Glaser, 1994). Before a stable deterrent can be assured, nuclear armed states need to ensure a sufficient number of weapons can survive first strike attack, ready to respond with a suitably devastating blow on the enemy: "second strike capability" (Wohlstetter, 1958). Although hardened missile silos and long-range bombers offered a reasonable—if temporary—second

strike capability in the 1960s,[277] the gold standard became and remains submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Both the US and the USSR had developed SLBMs at the end of the 1950s, and by the turn of the 1970s, although the US was ahead in terms of range and accuracy, both sides possessed a secure second strike SLBM capability (Ford, 1982, p.10-13; 26-29). Further, the late 1960s saw advances in satellite surveillance that allowed each side to accurately monitor the testing of new weapons systems and their deployment (Burr and Rosenberg, 2010, p.102). Thus, both sides had little doubts about the other side's capacity to inflict devastation on the other. In short, not only had the era of MAD had begun, but the era of mutual awareness of MAD.

The upshot of MAD should have been that the pressure to match the number and quality of weapon of one's adversary should have subsided. As Bernard Brodie noted "Weapons that do not have to fight their like do not become useless because of the advent of newer and superior types" (1973, p. 321). Instead, the weapons need only survive, which in the era of SLBMs was a considerably easier problem to solve than matching an opponent's technology. Similarly, a second strike capability should also remove the need to match an adversary's power or number of weapons. A country need not concern itself with the relative power, it need only ensure it can inflict the requisite absolute level of devastation upon an adversary deemed necessary to deter. Beyond a certain point, extra weapons equate to paying to make the rubble bounce. Thus, as Kenneth Waltz (1981, p. 5-6) argued, "variations of number mean little within wide ranges(…)Nuclear weapons make military miscalculations difficult and politically pertinent prediction easy." In sum, by the 1970s this technical innovation in delivery vehicles had seemingly realised nuclear weapons potential for escaping the security dilemma and removing the imperative to prioritise relative nuclear firepower. Indeed, in Glaser's view, the Superpower's accurate surveillance combined with their massive second strike capability should have led to the nuclear arms race petering out in the 1970s.[278]

While several prominent academics argued both before and after that concern for nuclear relative gains should have been blunted by MAD, if this view was limited to the ivory towers, then it might be unrealistic to expect it to overcome the historic *modus operandi* of great

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[277] Hardening the silos of the US's minutemen were stop-gap solution. Once the Soviets began MIRVing missiles, improving accuracy and increasing the size, the even hard silos could not survive attack. Indeed, worrying about the survivability of the US ICBMs became a long-term obsession for military and defence analysts throughout the Cold War (e.g. Nitze, 1976 ,p.229).
[278] To be clear, this is not a peacenik argument. The scholars that advocate this are self-proclaimed "Realists". Indeed, Waltz (1981) advocates for spreading nuclear weapons to other states rather than seeking to abolish or even prohibit nuclear weapons.

powers. However, the logic of "the absolute weapon" discourse, was not only found in mainstream US nuclear discourse, but it fundamentally informed the *official* US nuclear doctrine during the 1960s. Indeed, between 1961 and 1967 the US maintained a nuclear doctrine quite consistent with unilateral arms-control measures and the ability to accept relative numerical asymmetries. The Secretary of State (1960-1967), Robert McNamara, had put into practice the theory with what he called the "Assured Destruction" doctrine—soon after nicknamed MAD—which rejected the relevance of nuclear superiority or even equality to US security. In a famous address in San Francisco, McNamara explained the logic that underpinned the administrations nuclear philosophy: that counting launchers or gross-mega tonnage was an "inadequate indicator" of assured destruction capability because even with "*any* numerical superiority realistically attainable, the blunt inescapable fact remains that the Soviet Union could still with its present forces, effectively destroy the United States" (18 September, 1967).[279] Rather than *relative* power, what mattered was "an ability to inflict at all times and under all foreseeable conditions an unacceptable degree of damage upon any single aggressor, or combination of aggressors - even after absorbing a surprise attack." (1968, posture statement p. 47.). This was estimated to require the ability of the second strike to destroy 20-33 per cent of the Soviet population and 50-66 per cent of its industrial capacity (Freedman, 1989, p.246).[280]

While morbid, these doctrines embodied the logic that Glaser, Waltz, Jervis and co, have long articulated: the US could largely ignore relative numerical differences. Indeed, the US's own calculations showed how diminishing returns on force quickly set: even using the most conservative estimates, their own war gaming predicted that doubling the number of warheads from 400 to 800 would only destroy 1% more population and 9% more of the Soviet Union's industrial capacity (Freedman, 1989). The "absolute weapon" discourse was not merely an ivory tower theory of little salience, it was both politically salient and available within the prevailing elite and official discourse.[281] This only adds further reason to consider the post 1970s nuclear arms race among the superpowers *the* major puzzle of nuclear scholarship.

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[279] The speech was given to the *United Press* International editors and publishers (quoted in the The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 1967)
[280] This logic was also embodied within British nuclear doctrine during the Cold War, which defined its force levels according to the "Moscow Criterion": the absolute level of destruction that the government estimated was required to deter the Soviets.
[281] As the Robert McNamara quote above illustrates

This defensive realist expectation of nuclear cooperation under MAD can be formulated in a 2/2 matrix as a collective action *non*-dilemma (figure 2.). If the marginal military utility of building extra nuclear weapons falls to zero and we assume nuclear weapons are costly, then not only does the prisoner's dilemma change,[282] it ceases to be a dilemma at all. Assuming that once a sufficient second strike capability is achieved and all spending on additional weapons becomes waste, then the payoff matrix inverts. In such circumstances, the optimum outcome for a state faced with a nuclear adversary would be to invest in butter and hope that the adversary invests in additional guns. This situation resembles a Wild West duel whereby each additional gun offers diminishing returns, before inverting as the cowboy collapses under the weight of his arsenal. In short, power is still relational, but it is poorly evaluated by either the relative number or aggregate firepower. Indeed, this non-dilemma would appear to illuminate China's attitude to nuclear weapons during and after the Cold War: it required little cooperation or negotiation for China to eschew nuclear arms racing, despite its rivalry with both Russia and the USA.[283] Indeed according to defensive realists, this should be the norm: once a sufficient second strike capability is assured, it should not require active cooperation nor negotiation for a nuclear arms race to dwindle. Indeed, although Glaser (2000; 1994) does not put it in terms of an inverted prisoner's dilemma, this is implied by his expectation that post MAD, states could stop nuclear arms races "unilaterally".

Figure 2: Inverted Prisoner Dilemma

		A	
		Build	Do Not Build

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[282]The prisoner's dilemma "game" came to be used to describe and explain sub-optimal collective action outcome, the security dilemma, and arms racing in particular. In the case of the security dilemma it ostensibly explains why "rational" actors would choose engage in costly arms racing when all sides would seemingly benefit from arms control. See: O'Neill (1994) Schelling and Halperin (1961) Strategy and arms control, Axelrod Keohane (1985).

[283] Despite joining the nuclear club in 1962, China pursued a minimalist nuclear doctrine that explicitly eschewed the arms race of the Superpowers (Yunzhu, 2008).

B	Build	3 3	1 4
	Do Not Build	4 1	2 2

This is a hyper-stylized account, but helps us clarify the puzzle: If secure second strike nuclear weapons remove both the ambiguity in the cost-benefit analysis of conflict and dramatically reduce the marginal utility of additional aggregate power (beyond a certain threshold), why did the Superpower arms race persist and even accelerate in latter half of the Cold War? What were the incentives for racing well-past MAD? What was the value of matching the Soviet Union's nuclear build-up?

Filling in the Blanks: The Social Prizes of SALT

The Cold War is often used as the paradigmatic example of a security competition, yet it was also a competition for international status too (Glaser, 2018; Wohlforth, 2009).[284] The stakes in the competition were not only physical survival but the superiority of the their respective social-economic systems and ideologies. As such several public metrics emerged that served

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[284] Robert Jervis (1993) also mentions that status may help explain the competition between the superpowers. Although Jervis quickly moves on without evaluating the relative strength of this role, he certainly does not rule it out. Indeed, status "pop ups" frequently, but parenthetically, across IR research dealing with the Cold War during the early 1990s.

as proxies for status comparisons: from space exploration to Olympic games performance. Indeed, as Nicholas Onuf noted, Cold War "superpower" competition produced a "climate of contest and spectacle-an unending tournament, rounds of play in many arenas, all of us a captive audience." (Onuf, 1989, p.283). However, given military capabilities have long been the most important status markers defining great powers (Neumann, 2008; Gilady, 2018) and we would expect their relative militaries to become especially salient for their international status. Indeed, although nuclear arms race during the 1950s—which rapidly put considerable quantitative and qualitative distance between the superpowers and the rest of the world— may well have been driven by the security dilemma, it also necessarily affected their international status. Analogous to how status of the "leader" and the "challenger" emerges during the process of a sailing race, so the growing gap between the US and the Soviet Union and the rest, saw the emergence of a new status category: *the superpower*. Nuclear weapons came to symbolise technological mastery and modernity, qualities both superpowers were keen to display (O'Neil, 2006, p.10). While willingness to pursue global ends and fight proxy wars also constituted the status of superpower (Buzan, 2011), as Ringmar (2002, p.128) notes, "nuclear armaments were what defined a superpower as such". Yet, given the U.K, China, France joined the nuclear club, but not the superpower club, it is more accurate to say it was the ability and willingness to *compete* in the nuclear arms race that became the crucial status marker for superpowerdom.

Moreover, the discussion in chapter 3 provides grounds to expect that SALT processes themselves would enable and intensify concerns for status at SALT. Although bracketed by extant status research, status competition requires some agreement over the rules of the game in order for status competitions to unfold. In this regard, SALT facilitated inter-subjective agreement over both what was valuable and how to measure it. While additional information about the others' forces is expected by Glaser (1994; 2000) to help mitigate arms races and improve arms control, my status approach suggests that conspicuous relative comparisons would constitute SALT as a status competition and thus hinder trade-offs. Indeed, the negotiations took the form of a public spectacle and thus encouraged highly public comparisons of force levels. Although the previous administration had questioned the relevance of relative comparisons of force levels post-MAD, the relational structure of SALT negotiations insisted upon them. Moreover, the US government knew that such comparisons, publicised in the treaty, would be widely circulated, publicised and poured over by international and domestic audiences. This "information", once circulated about the relative capabilities could be imbued with a social value beyond its military purpose. Indeed, as the

analyses will shows, the US government keenly analysed how their possible SALT negotiating positions could be interpreted by their alliance partners, non-aligned countries, and domestic audiences. Ultimately, SALT seemed well designed to become a focal point for assessing the superpowers status. While the Superpowers may have enjoyed the attention,[285] how those interested parties interpret the meaning of SALT – the rules of this public game – were beyond the superpowers' control.

All this constitutes preliminary reasons to suggest that more was at stake in the nuclear arms race and SALT than deterring the enemy. Prima facie it offers a plausible explanation for why the prisoners dilemma quality of the nuclear competition did not disappear with the onset of MAD, and specifically for our purposes here; why arms control would prove so difficult and ultimately founder. However, at this point it is only conjecture, to evaluate whether how status mattered to SALT we must dig into the archives.

The grammar of status heuristic can help illuminate and evaluate the significance of the social prizes at stake at SALT. Recall that in status competitions, audiences bestow prizes on the winner and punishments on the loser and that these prizes are independent from whether the protagonists consider the rules of game are just or fair. Ostensibly, the main social prize on offer was the successful deterrence of the enemy.[286] However, the nuclear competition did not take place in a vacuum: international audiences were expected to reward good or bad performance with practices of deference and loyalty. Meanwhile, from the US administrations' perspective, the domestic audiences could also bestow electoral prizes and punishments. Indeed, the grammar of status framework operates here as a lens that can help clarify and illuminate the social prizes theorized to be in play when the administration weighed up potential SALT negotiation positions, beyond just deterrence.

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[285] The archives reveal how keen President Nixon was on summitry, even if he attempted to play it cool with the Soviets. Meanwhile, as several authors have noted, the Soviet's placed a high value on SALT because arms control was the one arena where the US treated them as an equal before the world. The summitry part of this practice was therefore crucial for publicising and symbolising the US recognition of the Soviets (Anderson and Farrel, 1996, p.70-77 ;see also Ringmar, 2002)

[286] No matter how powerful a state's nuclear weapons, they cannot deter if they are kept a secret: As *Dr. Stranglov* illustrates, even a Doomsday Device cannot work if the enemy is oblivious. Indeed, deterrence is an inherently social phenomenon: one must make one's power publicly known in order for it to exert a relational force (deterrence) over the behaviour of another. This is not to say that publicly recognised/known power is sufficient to deter (see the Falklands war), but it a necessary condition.

This will allow me to adjudicate between potential reasons for the US's negotiating positions at SALT. This is important because at the time of SALT, there were members of the strategic community who advocated for equality or superiority in nuclear force levels on military grounds that had little to do with international or domestic audiences' assessments. For instance, to deter the Soviets, some influential members of the strategic community argued it was important to match or exceed the Soviet's force level such that the US could guarantee "escalation dominance", and/or undertake limited nuclear wars (e.g. Kahn, 1965). Paul Nitze argued that failing to at least match the Soviet levels risked granting the Soviets leverage in crisis situations (Nitze, 1976). Some even argued that it was possible for the US to achieve nuclear superiority such that they could "win" a nuclear war (e.g. Gray, 1979; Gray & Payne, 1980). Indeed, these arguments would lead to a similar *outcome*: arms control would be severely hindered by concerns for relative gains in the treaty negotiations. However, while the outcome would be similar, the mechanism would differ. To ascertain which was in operation we need to go back over the US preparations for SALT and ask: How was the US's SALT strategy legitimated backstage? Was it primarily legitimated in reference to deterrence or other rationale related to influencing Soviet behaviour? Or did other social prizes and punishments dominate, such as how international and domestic audiences would respond, take precedence? We will also be in a good position to assess whether the "absolute weapon" discourse featured and how it was marginalized backstage.

Beyond investigating how the SALT strategy was legitimated, my status grammar heuristic can also enable me to trace whether and how the rules of the nuclear hierarchy were shaped by the SALT process itself and the public discourse around it. As chapter 3 argued, state-status competitions seldom approach the ideal of an Olympic competition: state's activities may be constituted with the grammar of status competition, but participants may lack inter-subjective agreement over the rules of the game. Instead, the criteria upon which states, and their publics, assess international status may be heavily contested and/or diverge (also see, Pouliot, 2014). Therefore, the framework opens up another vector of analysis: paying attention to the *process* of how the rules of the game emerged, were contested and how particular criteria for evaluating the competition marginalized alternatives.

A few clarifications are in order regarding rationality and motivations. First, it should be noted I am investigating competing rational*ities*, rather than "rational deterrence" versus "irrational status" concerns. As Jonathon Renshon (2017, p.45) has pointed out, so long as the means are suitable to pursue the ends, social goals like status can be just as rational as

"strategic" goals like security. Second, I make no claims to be able to access the protagonist's motivations; I am only interested in how the policy was legitimated (see Krebs, 2015), what was the argument that carried to justify the position the US took, and how did this help or hinder SALT I and II. As some suspected at the time, the military members of the bureaucracy, may not have been arguing in good faith and may have been driven by alternative motivations than those that they expressed in meetings and memorandums.[287] Meanwhile, it is perfectly possible to legitimate a SALT policy on the grounds of international status and be motivated by security or fear. Both these possibilities and other discrepancies between public legitimation and private motivation could well be the case but it makes no difference to my argument one way or the other.

Alternative & Complementary Explanations

In one sense, I am following the lead of scholars who have sought to explain "sub-optimal" foreign policy outcomes by exploring how domestic politics affects foreign policy.[288] I agree with their overall assessment: structural pressures are indeterminate and that governments, especially superpowers have considerable leeway to pursue questionable policies without getting punished by the system. Regarding defence policy, this strand of research has focused on how bureaucratic politics (Tal, 2017; Allison and Halperin, 1972), variation in government structures (Risse-Kappen, 1991), and perception bias (Jervis, 2017; Wohlforth, 1993), have led to diversions from structural theories expectations. My argument does not directly contradict these explanations. In fact, some can be read as facilitating conditions to my status argument.

For instance, my status approach complements rather than contradicts the argument that bureaucratic politics[289]—variations on the military industrial complex—fuelled the arms race.[290] These explanations disaggregate the state into a series of actors, which are said to

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[287] For instance, General Snowcroft wrote to Kissinger that he suspected "that the JCS don't want an agreement and will pursue any convenient argument to prevent it" Message from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to Secretary of State Kissinger Washington, January 22, 1976, 0501Z.

[288] Perhaps by far the most influential strand of this type of theorizing is neo-classical realism that posits domestic factors as intervening variables that explain how states respond to the structural pressures of anarchy. My work here is in a similar ballpark, however I do not treat anarchy and balance of capabilities as the primary structure, instead I argue that international structures; social or material, do not exert any structural pressure upon states that is not wholly dependent upon the discursive practices that theorize this pressure into existence. For influential reviews of neoclassical realism research see: Rathbun (2008) and Rose (1998).

[289] For the seminal work on bureaucratic explanations see Allison and Halperin (1972) Allison (1969) For bureaucratic applied to nuclear weapons proliferation see Sagan (1997)

[290] The concept was coined in a speech by Eisenhower in 1961 and quickly caught the public and academia's imagination. Eisenhower, D. (1961), Public papers of the presidents of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: US GPO)

have vested interests encouraging the nuclear arms race (Sagan, 1997). The state becomes a series of competing bureaucracies seeking to protect and expand their budget. To achieve this, the military in particular, are said to use their authority and expertise to exaggerate threats thereby helping to legitimate new weapons systems and increase their relative power among other bureaucracies. This may imply instrumental securitization, whereby rather than a rational response to a threatening world, the military and its bureaucratic allies are implicated in manufacturing the threat to which it provides the solution. It becomes a "military industrial complex", once the arms industries and the democratic representatives are involved in the same process. The thin version of this argument would suggest this is a subconscious effect of the strategic culture of preparing for the worst case scenario. A thick version of this argument verges on a conspiracy: the military and its dependents knowingly inflate threats to buttress their budget or please their financiers (Rosen, 1973).[291] To be sure, the archives reviewed here provide plenty of support for the 'thin' thesis: the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and various military men provide consistently pessimistic interpretations of the arms race and frequently use this to hinder arms control (also see Tal, 2017). However, if bureaucratic politics posits an explanation for why certain groups had vested interests in pushing for more weapons, my argument explains *how* this was done in practice. The military had to be able to provide a legitimate rationale for their demands, which could not simply be "to expand our budget and bureaucratic power". Indeed, as we will see, the members of the US military bureaucracy frequently relied quite explicitly on status arguments to legitimate their insistence upon equal aggregates and thus prioritise relative gains in the SALT negotiations.

The Role of Congress in US Treaty Ratification

The US treaty ratification process provides a crucial condition and mechanism for how the domestic politics (bureaucratic, party-political, and domestic status concerns) could influence the arms control process. Because international treaties require approval by a 2/3 majority in the Senate, leading senators could wield outsized influence and hold the executive hostage. As Trimble and Weiss (1991, p.646) note reviewing the history of international treaties, as a result, "Senate and congressional influence on arms control has been ubiquitous and important". Beyond, voting down the treaty, and or insisting on amendments, congress can utilise informal mechanisms such as hearings, personal correspondence, taking up advisory

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[291] In the material analysed for this dissertation, the thick thesis crops up mainly as an accusation among critics of the US's nuclear policy. However, the nature of archive materials reviewed here – minutes of security meetings and public discourse— were unlikely to provide the sort of evidence needed to make the thick case stick.

positions on US delegation to negotiations. Consequently, the executive has excellent reason to take into account domestic politics and as my analysis will show, during the preparations and negotiations of SALT they frequently did. As Krebs (2015) notes, in democracies, everything needs to be legitimated or potentially legitimated. In the case of SALT: this implied theorizing what would or would not "sell" to congress.

The US's ratification process is thus a facilitating condition for my argument. It can also help explain why according to Kissinger, there was a "near majority" of senators who believed in minimum deterrence, yet the US could not pursue arms control in manner that reflected these ideas.[292] While the "doves" were sometimes taken into account, the minutes of the security meetings reveal that the chief audience President Nixon, Ford and later Carter were most anxious to appease were the "right".[293] Although the left were left underwhelmed by SALT I & II and frustrated by the modesty of its proposals, they could generally be presumed to prefer limited arms control to no arms control.[294] The same could not be said for the right.[295] In terms of the arms control debate, the "right" comprised of "Cold Warriors"—from both parties – who were sceptical to the very idea of arms control and on the basis that they doubted a mutually beneficial deal was possible, and even if such a deal were possible, whether the Soviets could be trusted to keep it.[296] However, especially during the heyday of détente (early 1970s), the right could not oppose arms control on principle and required other grounds to oppose an agreement.[297] Moreover, the degree of scepticism varied from outright opposition to mere suspicion that could be assuaged with a combination of consultation, reason and horse-trading (Platt, 1991, p.251-260).[298] These conservative groups constituted

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[292] Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford Washington, October 18, 1974.

[293] Though, Nixon had some advantages here: he could lean on his Cold Warrior credentials from his earlier career (Platt, 1991, p. 270).

[294] Though it should be noted disillusionment with arms control was widespread on both sides by the 1970s: it failed to live up to expectations of anti-nuclearists, while "Cold Warriors" claimed it had resulted in US nuclear inferiority. See: Kruzel (1981)

[295] For an extended discussion of the criticism from the right during SALT I & II, see Tal (2017, p. 113-117; 266-269) Caldwell (1991), and for an example, see Nitze (1976).

[296] Although Republicans comprised the majority of the critics to SALT, it would be a mistake to suggest it was divided neatly along party lines. For instance, in 1976 an influential a bipartisan group of "Jackson Democrats" and "Conservative Republicans" established the Committee of Present Danger, which campaigned against arms control and any arms control deal with the Soviets (Bohlen, 2003, p.14).

[297] This was also a view held by some within the administration at the time. For instance, General Snowcroft wrote to Kissinger that he suspected "that the JCS don't want an agreement and will pursue any convenient argument to prevent it" Message from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to Secretary of State Kissinger Washington, January 22, 1976, 0501Z.

[298] For instance, in seeking Congressional ratification for SALT I, President Nixon promised new weapon acquisitions would follow SALT, and endorsed an amendment seeking to restrict negotiation leeway in future arms limitation (see below, also Platt, 1991, p. 570)

a crucial audience for SALT negotiations, whose understanding of the rules of the nuclear competition were frequently taken into account by all the administrations—Nixon, Ford, and Carter's—that took part in the SALT negotiations.

The next section analyses whether and how various representations of international status hierarchies informed the US's negotiating positions and ultimately the outcomes of SALT I and II. What follows is not an argument for why specific arms programs were legitimated, but how status concerns hindered SALT negotiations and the US's ability to pursue its preferred strategic objectives, and how this explains why SALT II proved far more difficult than defensive realists expect(ed). Beyond this headline argument, the analysis advances four interconnected theses:

(1)   The particular theory of nuclear equality that made negotiating SALT II arduous, emerged out of SALT I and only became dominant through the process of negotiating SALT II. Not only were alternative theories of equality available, these were recognised as making more strategic sense than the theory of equality in launchers that was eventually settled upon

(2) The primary value theorized to be associated with equality in launchers was based upon domestic and international audience's expected response, rather than strategic reasoning related to deterrence.

 (3) SALT I was far easier to negotiate because this particular theory of status – privileging aggregate launchers— was marginalized, and thus the US was able to negotiate according to an alternative logic than status competition: achieving gains relative to no treaty, rather than insisting upon equality under the treaty.

(4) The domestic public's response to SALT I following its ratification was successfully mobilized backstage to support the claim that the rules of nuclear status competition required insisting upon equality in launchers. This provided a crucial discursive resource for theorizing the social value of numerical equality. As such, I argue that the status competition that ultimately suckered SALT II was to a large extent of the United States own making.

To support these claims, the following sections traces and analyses the US's arms control policy-making process – how their negotiating positions were legitimated– from SALT I to SALT II.

SALT I: Strategy over Symmetry

The Eisenhower administration first approached the Soviet Union about the possibility of arms control in 1967. Initially the Soviets refused to countenance the idea of limiting arms when they still lagged behind the US (Burr & Rosenberg, 2010) However, by 1969 the Soviets fast-approached numerical parity and most observers agreed the superpowers were militarily stalemated (Burr & Rosenberg, 2010). Moreover, after initial befuddlement, arms control theories[299] had begun to catch on among Soviet Union strategists and diffuse into elite circles (Adler, 1992, p.134–137). Thus, when the US announced plans to develop the Sentinel ABM system in the late 1960s, the Soviets were primed to reconsider their attitude to nuclear arms control. For their part, President Nixon and Kissinger[300] were keen on SALT I as a means to pursue containment through détente and domestic political goals. President Nixon also saw SALT as an opportunity to play "peacemaker" and thus offset his troubles in Vietnam (Burr & Rosenberg, 2010, p.107).[301] It is also worth noting that President Nixon's reputation as a Cold Warrior gave him more leeway to pursue arms control than a democrat or more dovish president (Bowyker & Williams, 1988, p.42). Although the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia delayed the onset of SALT, negotiations formally began in November 1969.

To understand how theories of international status structured the SALT II negotiations, we must begin with SALT I. The first SALT agreement limited Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) sites to two apiece, while the Interim Agreement on offensive nuclear weapons "froze" the number SLBMs and ICBMs for a duration of five years (1972-1977). Looked at in isolation, the ABM agreement was the most important result of SALT I and was rightly hailed as a major arms control achievement. In short, it cut off at source what many predicted would have been a rapid arms spiral, whereby each side would build the missiles necessary to overwhelm the opposing side's defenses. However, as I will show, the missile freeze would lead to significant downstream effects upon SALT II, and therefore it is this part I will focus on here. Although the exact numbers were omitted from the treaty text, in practice the freeze meant that the US was permitted 1054 ICBMs and 656 SLBMs, while the Soviets were allowed 1618 ICBMs and 950 SLMBs and. While these numerical differences were offset by

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[299] For instance, that missile defence systems would cost a fortune and ultimately hinder rather than help security (Brennan, 1961).

[300] Henry Kissinger, who was Chief Security Advisor to the President in SALT I and Secretary of State in SALT II was a crucial figure in both Nixon and Ford's Administrations' SALT policy. However, as the Watergate scandal hit and Ford took over (1973-1976), his political capital fell as SALT II negotiations got underway. This undoubtedly strengthened the hand of hawks in the military and James Schlesinger (Secretary of Defense) that wanted to take a tougher line on SALT II (Tal, 2017).

[301] One reason why SALT I agreement was reached so rapidly was due to President Nixon's keenness for the Moscow summit to take place prior to the 1972 election. Indeed, his eagerness to organise the summit quickly is palpable throughout the minutes recorded in the archives.

the US's qualitative superiority in other areas, one might have expected that agreeing to unequal numerical limits would have proved a tough sell to Congress. Yet, following considerable lobbying and no-little horse-trading, the House and the Senate approved both agreements with comprehensive majorities.[302]   However, although the treaties eventually passed with relative ease, the shape the interim agreement eventually took could have been quite different. In fact, it may not have been concluded at all had dissenting voices within the military been heeded by the administration.

<p style="text-align:center;">*SALT I: Accepting "Inequality"*</p>

Indeed, the military had pushed for the US to insist upon a treaty with equal aggregate launchers throughout SALT I negotiations.[303] While this might not be surprising in itself, the rationale the military used to push for equality rested less on strategic concerns than on managing public perceptions of position. For instance, in a paper prepared for the National Security Council (NSC), which discussed the significance of the Soviets being permitted more submarines than the US under the interim agreement, the paper conceded that "the strategic advantages to the Soviets of continuing to build Y class subs are not great". However, it insisted that "the political, diplomatic, and psychological advantages could be significant."[304] Even in the months running up to the final Moscow Summit, the military—via the JCS—was still pushing for numerical equality. Again, their reasoning speaks to perceptions and psychology as much as strategy:

> There are those who argue that, at the high levels of strategic weapons possessed by the United States and the USSR, simple numerical advantages are not significant. The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not accept that view. *Superiority, equality, and inferiority* have not only a military but also a political and psychological impact on US security interests. The United States should never sign an agreement which places it in a position that other nations, including the other party to the agreement, could *perceive* as a position of US strategic inferiority. [my emphasis][305]

However, the military's theories of the potential social effects of accepting numerical inequality were eventually overruled. The national security advisor to the president during SALT I, Henry Kissinger, strongly opposed the military's demand for an agreement with

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[302] The Senate passed both the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement with majorities of 88-2
[303] Memorandum From the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Zumwalt) to Secretary of Defense Laird
[304] Issues Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff Washington, undated. NSC MEETING ON SALT March 17, 1972
[305] Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to Secretary of Defense Laird JCSM–99–72 Washington, March 6, 1972.

equal numerical aggregates.[306] He argued that not only did the various US capabilities that fell outside the agreement (MIRVS, FBS, Bombers) offset any numerical disparity, but given the US lacked any plans or programs to build either new SLBMs or ICBMs, any freeze on the Soviet side would be to the US's advantage.[307] Thus, it was better to limit the Soviets than not at all; the US would make relative gains regardless of the perception of inequality. Ultimately, the military did not get their way: the interim agreement that emerged out of SALT I froze the SLBMs and ICBMs at levels whereby the US were permitted fewer submarine and land-based launches. Kissinger would see this result as a remarkable negotiating feat. As he put it, the US had not been "stopped" from doing anything they had planned, while the Soviet's build-up had been halted. In fact, Kissinger considered it "miraculous" that the US had managed to limit submarines and ICBMs included "when we had next to no chips."[308] Here we can clearly see how Kissinger's concern for relative gains did not necessarily mean being allowed more launchers than the Soviet's under the treaty, but relative to what would have transpired without a treaty.

In retrospect, it seems reasonable that rather than a "miracle", the Soviets were taking more social prizes into account than Kissinger. As the US's own intelligence indicated, the Soviets were said to be "obsessed" with numbers. As such, it seems plausible that institutionalising *publicly* unequal aggregates in the interim agreement provided them with a valuable social prize in itself. Indeed, the fall-out from SALT I would suggest that more had been at stake in the negotiations than Kissinger had appreciated.[309] To be sure, the strategic community were generally positive to SALT I. A symposium published in *Survival* reflecting on SALT I and the interim agreement, generally considered the agreement to be just and the numerical disparities to be "of no security significance" (Scoville, et al, 1972, p.210). Meanwhile, the

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[306] Nixon invested considerable authority in Kissinger in the SALT negotiations, which at least prior to Watergate, lent his views on SALT positions special authority. For a more detailed discussion of the inter-personal politics of SALT see Tal (2017)

[307] Kissinger would end up defending SALT I along these lines throughout the SALT II negotiations. See: Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, June 20, 1974, 3:10–5:10 p.m. Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, September 14, 1974, 10:08 a.m.–noon; Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, January 19, 1976, 9:57–11:40 a.m.

[308] Conversation Among President Nixon, Senator John Stennis, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), and the President's Deputy Assistant for Legislative Affairs (Korologos) Washington, June 13, 1972.

[309] The backlash against SALT I often featured in the top tier discussions, infuriating Kissinger, who frequently lamented that the SALT I agreements were misunderstood and that the military had failed to defend it against claims that it had institutionalized inferiority. For instance, in a Verification panel meeting in 1974, he lamented that "These constant attacks on SALT I as a sell-out must stop. We had no missile program. Not one US program was stopped by SALT I. It may be that some Soviet programs were stopped. Indeed, several US programs were accelerated[…]These attacks are untrue and they're phony and they have to stop. Minutes of a Meeting of the Verification Panel Washington, April 23, 1974, 10:19–11:45 a.m.

initial reaction upon signing the treaty saw President Nixon bask in the unlikely acclaim of the *New York Times*, which reported that the agreements were "probably the most important accords of the postwar period." (*The New York Times*, 28 May, 1972) Nonetheless, SALT I did suffer public criticism. For instance, John Ashbrook (Republican from Ohio), who was standing for the Republican presidential nomination, claimed on the House floor that the SALT agreements would "lock the Soviet Union into unchallengeable superiority" and "plunge the United States and its allies into a decade of danger."[310] Moreover, following the acclaim that met its signing and ratification, conservatives turned against SALT I, and arms control through the course of the 1970s.[311] While the SALT I agreements were widely hailed at the time as a harbinger of what détente could achieve, as the 70s wore on and tensions and political crises between Soviets and US persisted, SALT I became a symbol of the folly of Détente for a growing number of the right. Indeed, especially following Jimmy Carter's election, the right rallied around opposition to SALT II.[312]

One senator's amendment during the ratification process and the administration's response to it would take on particular significance in the next round of SALT. A crucial thorn in the side of the government, throughout both SALT I (and later SALT II) was Senator "Scooter" Jackson.[313] Jackson, a leading Democrat hawk with presidential ambitions, nicknamed "the Senator from Boeing" because of his ties to the defence giant (Bloodsworth, 2006, p.71), was a persistent critic of the SALT negotiations and the eventual agreement. Moreover, his stature as an expert on defence matters, a leading member of Senate's Armed Services Committee, and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Salt, made him a crucial senator consecutive administrations sought to woo into supporting SALT I and II (Platt, 1991; Tal, 2017; Caldwell, 1991). True to form, Jackson had publicly spoken out against the SALT I Interim Agreement's provisions, arguing that the freeze froze the United States into a position of "sub-parity" and would put the United States at a disadvantage.[314] Jackson – zoomed in on the aggregate disparities and sought to attach a congressional understanding

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[310] Cited in Platt (1991, p.241)

[311] As Kissinger complained in 1974, "we [Americans] have talked ourselves into a national psychosis on how far behind we are." Minutes of a Meeting of the Verification Panel Washington, April 23, 1974, 10:19–11:45 a.m.

[312] Among many anti-SALT groups, the Committee on the Present Danger, was "by all the single most effective organization within the Washington beltway opposing the treaty" (Caldwell, 1991, p. 326-327). Formed just 3 days after Carter's election it counted a formidable list of former generals and high ranking government officials, including Paul Nitze who had been a member of the previous administration's SALT delegation.

[313] Jackson features prominently in the NSC and Verification Panel meetings of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations, even the Soviets mentioned his name during the negotiations.

[314] Reported in the *New York Times* (8 Aug, 1972)

to the interim agreement. The Jackson Amendment, as it became known, demanded that any future SALT agreement must have "equal numbers of intercontinental strategic launchers taking account of throw weight" and initially demanded that the US government reserve the right to abrogate the treaty should any the USSR undertake any missile modernization during the interim period that threaten the United States' Minutemen missiles.[315] As the *New York Times* noted at the time, Jackson's nuclear counting was misleading:

> There is no doubt that, to the layman, the numerical edge in the interim offensive pact appears to give the Soviet Union an advantage, although the Pentagon and its supporters know that this is not so. President Nixon showed political courage in agreeing to the Moscow terms. To undermine this achievement and further arms control prospects by concessions to Mr. Jackson and the military-industrial complex would be the height of folly. (*New York Times*, August 7, 1972)

Yet, the way the administration defended SALT I, emphasized that the asymmetry on launchers was equalized by the asymmetry on warheads. The upshot of this position was that while it helped get SALT I ratified it also tacitly legitimated the theory that relative numbers were a useful way of evaluating both the SALT agreements and the status of the competitors in the nuclear arms race in general. Moreover, the Nixon administration, eager to win the support of Jackson and his followers, endorsed Jackson's demand for future offensive weapons agreements to be based upon the "principle of equality" in aggregate numbers of launchers. The governments rationale for supporting Jackson's amendment was as short-term as it was pragmatic – it would allow the administration to ratify SALT. Some have suggested that the Nixon administration was playing an intricate two level game here: Endorsing an amendment that restricted the US's negotiation position, in order to strengthen the US's hands in future negotiations (Platt,1991, p.252). However, this reading seems unlikely given that Kissinger, who was the dominant voice during SALT, frequently argued against insisting on equal aggregates in both the SALT I and the SALT II negotiations. Moreover, prioritising equal numbers would mean foregoing other strategic priorities. Instead, it seems far more likely that they endorsed the "Jackson Resolution" primarily to smooth ratification prior to the upcoming 1972 election.

The reasonable sounding principle of "equal aggregates" would have significant down-stream effects in the later SALT II negotiations. First, demanding "equality" in the context of the arms race invoked the grammar of status competition: it embodied a demand for (joint) top

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[315] Senate Joint Resolution 241 on the Interim Strategic Offensive Arms Agreement, August 7. 1972. The amendment mandated equality in U.S. and Soviet strategic arms.

position and constituted the nuclear arms race as a zero sum status game. The representations of inferiority and inequality, when based on a number of weapons, produced a clear competitive status hierarchy and simultaneously legitimated demanding equality in the future and deligitimating "inequality". While this the demand for equality in itself was not controversial, Jackson also defines the rules of competition. Indeed the criteria Jackson invoked, *specified* a particular means of assessing the nuclear hierarchy and SALT: aggregate numbers of launchers.[316] This was not an inevitable mode of comparison: the backstage and frontstage debate around SALT I indicated several other plausible ways to evaluate the US's nuclear position, of which counting launchers was only one questionable, albeit straightforward, measure. However, by endorsing Jackson's amendment, even though it was only advisory, the government legitimated using number of nuclear launchers as the principle means of evaluating the relative power of the US and USSR. Finally, the principle of *equality in aggregates* established and legitimated the logic that the nuclear defence required paying attention to relative aggregate forces, rather than alternative logics of assessing security: the stability or vulnerability of the nuclear forces, as some arms controllers preferred (e.g. Schelling, 1985); or the assured destruction doctrine of the last administration. As we will see, the demand for equality in aggregates of launchers' would eventually come to solidify into cross-party conventional wisdom of what was an appropriate goal for SALT II.

SALT II: Specifying Equality

We noted the Soviet position of 27, U.S. of 28. Gromyko said this difference was so slight that the public would be amused if it were published.[317]

Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, December 1978

If in SALT I the social value of equality had not been clarified, or not yet produced, as negotiations for SALT II got under way it would eventually become taken for granted as

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[316] As Jackson (2014, p.266) explains, specification is a rhetorical move employed by political actors to corner opponents by taking a widely accepted value, and defining it precisely in a particular context to support one's agenda (and delegitimise one's opponents). Here "equality" is a taken for granted moral value and equality with the Soviet Union was difficult to argue against. However, embodied within Jackson's demand for equality is the much more controversial claim that equality in nuclear weapons is best measured by number of launchers.

[317] Telegram From Secretary of State Vance to the White House Brussels, December 24, 1978, 0038Z.

essential. Across the first two administrations that took part in SALT II negotiations—Nixon and Ford's—equal aggregates were debated and eventually settled upon as the primary negotiating priority. Perhaps surprisingly, while President Carter strove for greater reductions in the total level of the aggregates, his administration's position never wavered from the demand for equal aggregates.[318] The priority given to equal aggregate of launchers was reflected in the minutes of security meetings, as well as all the official documents spelling out the formal negotiating position of each administration from Nixon's to Carter's.[319]

This is puzzling for several reasons. First of all, there were several alternatives of measuring the equality seriously under consideration that suggest measuring equality by aggregate launchers was a far from an inevitable outcome.[320] Indeed, as Kissinger pointed out early in the process of SALT II, equality could means several different things:

> Everyone agrees that one of our most fundamental objectives in SALT Two is equality. The real question is, how do we define equality. Do we mean (1) equality in first-strike capability, (2) equality in second strike capability, (3) equality in numbers of launchers and re-entry vehicles, or (4) equality in assured destruction capability.[321]

Mover, as I will show below, the fiercest proponents of equality in launchers in the backstage negotiations, readily admitted in the backstage debates that the marginal strategic utility of those extra weapons was negligible and launchers equality was a poor way of evaluating the nuclear balance. Third, the US did not end up matching the Soviet's aggregate force level, and it was not clear backstage that the military even planned to. Finally, although Jackson amendment demanded equality in launchers, it was not legally binding and both President Nixon and Ford both discussed alternatives. Given all this, why did equality become settled upon as priority in SALT II, and why was aggregate equality defined in the way it was? Moreover, what were the opportunity costs of insisting upon equality? The argument below

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[318] It might seem puzzling that the President most explicitly committed to disarmament had the most difficulty with negotiating arms control. Yet, while Carter belied a strong conviction to lower levels of weapons in his negotiations his administration did not translate this desire into a willingness to make more concessions: he ruled out accepting anything other than equality in launchers.

[319] For instance, Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon1 Washington, November 8, 1972; Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) Washington, December 1, 1972. Minutes of a Meeting of the Verification Panel Washington, January 8, 1974, 10:12–11:32 a.m.; Presidential Directive/NSC–71 Washington, March 23, 1977.

[320] This is not even to mention a) the mode of counting "equality" ignored US sponsored "tactical" nuclear weapons in Europe, which were capable of hitting the Soviet Union and b) the US's NATO allies, who possessed strategic nuclear weapons, explicitly targeted upon the Soviet Union. For instance, the UK's strategic doctrine was based around the "Moscow Criterion".

[321] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, March 8, 1973, 10:10–11:30 a.m.

is concerned with how that framework – of strict aggregate numerical equality in launchers – came to become prioritised and legitimated by consecutive administrations, and with what consequences for arms control and the US for reaching either a better or earlier agreement.[322]

First of all, the archives show how the domestic audience and congress structured the administrations SALT negotiation strategy from the outset. President Nixon was keen to be presented with options for SALT negotiating positions and for their relative merits to be debated and defended before any decision was made. Throughout the preparations for SALT I and SALT II, whether an option could be "sold" to congress was frequently asked and treated as a deal-breaker. It was not only concerns for hawks that structured the SALT discussion, Doves, and sometimes even NIMBYs,[323] were taken into account too. Put simply they sought to avoid looking like they were fuelling the arms race but also not losing it either. This balancing act is nicely illustrated by Kissinger's dismissal of a potential negotiating position in the run up to the Vladivostok summit:

> I believe we are unanimous in saying that the Soviets probably will not accept it and that it is not salable in this country. [...] You would be vulnerable to the right because it has no constraints on Backfire; and vulnerable to the left because there are no constraints on cruise missiles. People will say this is a phony agreement and that it jeopardizes our national interest.[324]

Indeed, throughout SALT I and SALT II negotiations, the US decision-makers theorized how the domestic audience would respond and would act upon their theories by discounting particular options as "[un]sellable".[325] In this way, the administration's theorizations of the expected domestic response to particular arms control proposals structured the negotiations. The archives show quite clearly that the administration acted upon what they believed the domestic preference were, even if they went against what they personally considered reasonable or plausible. This is a useful starting point – showing that domestic politics influenced the ostensibly high-politics of arms control—but it will not surprise many American political scientists. Indeed, given that ratifying the an international treaty requires

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[322] To be sure, negotiations involved extensive haggling over technical questions. However, at the point whereby the delegation in Geneva or Helsinki were put to work on the technical rules, closing loop holes, and finding technically and politically acceptable ways to verify MIRVed and unMIRVED missiles began, they could not question the principle of relative equality that provided the framework for their work. Thus, the delegation was tasked with how they would assure they end up with the best definition of equality possible in terms of relative gains, rather than *why* they negotiated to ensure equality in the first place. Here, the "strategic" negotiation involved each trying to manoeuvre for slight advantages – in terms of counting rules, silo measurements etc, date of initiation –within the framework established by the principals.

[323] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, September 17, 1975

[324] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, January 8, 1976

[325] This metaphor was used to theorize what SALT position would or would not make it past congress frequently across all the administrations.

a 2/3 majority in the senate, it would be remarkable if the administrations did not take congress into account.

Theorizing the Domestic and International Rules of the Game

Surveying the minutes of the NSC and Verification panel meetings, saleability became defined in terms of "equality" in aggregate number of launchers. However, this position had to be justified *vis a vis* alternative measures of equality (e.g throw-weight) and proposals to offset disparity in launchers with MIRVs, as well as during discussion regarding how to count the aggregate. Thus, the archives provide a clear window into *what* value equality in launchers was represented to provide for the US, and *where* that value was said to be derived from.

The process of ratifying SALT I played a crucial role in specifying "equality" and defining the domestic prizes and punishments associated with alternative SALT negotiating positions. Even though it was only advisory, the Jackson amendment, came to symbolise the domestic pressure to insist upon equality in aggregates, even though it lacked "strategic" rationale. For instance, During the preliminary preparations for SALT II, a memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff, illustrates how Jackson came to embody rhetorical short-hand for the political and domestic pressure for "equality":

> [F]or political-diplomatic reasons, the perpetuation of unequal numbers is regarded by a certain body of opinion, reflected by Senator Jackson, as an unacceptable long term arrangement, and acceptable in the short-term only because we still have technological advantages and strategic systems not covered by the agreement, and because theoretically at least, we can break out after 5 years […]The forward base issue is probably perceived by the Soviets in much the same way as we perceive at least a part of the problem posed for us by the numerical disparities contained in the Interim Agreement. That is, they find these bases obnoxious mostly for diplomatic/political/ psychological reasons rather than because they pose serious military threats, much as we find the 62:41 submarine ratio *politically* unacceptable as a long-term arrangement.[326]

In other words, inequality in numbers were seen as "obnoxious" quite independently from their strategic importance. It's clear that these "political" and "psychological" reasons must have been important if they could trump strategic reasoning. Perhaps surprisingly, it was the Secretary of Defense – James Schlesinger—who emphasized Jackson and the *domestic* concern for equality most vociferously in the SALT II top level meetings. For instance, in a

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[326] Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security (Kissinger) Washington, November 3, 1972.

NSC meeting when the administration were considering again whether to resist the Soviet request for unequal aggregates to offset the US's forward based systems (FBS)[327], Schlesinger does not make the strategic case, but leans instead upon the presumed opposition of Jackson and his ilk:

> Secretary Schlesinger: Inherently, this kind of decision is simple to make. The question is whether militarily, diplomatically, and politically, you want to move rapidly toward the Soviet proposal of giving the U.S. inferiority in numbers. This would be very difficult to justify. Unequal numbers would not have much Congressional support, and would violate the *Jackson Amendment* which requires equal numbers. It would be difficult to persuade the American public that any position other than equal aggregates, especially as our going-in position, is the correct one.[328]

Later Schlesinger expresses the priority for the diplomatic and political advantages even more bluntly, rounding off his contribution to a NSC meeting on SALT with "On the question of equal aggregates, it is politically and diplomatically crucial. *Perhaps, it is the most critical feature.* We can live with an increase in instability, but it would be difficult not to come up to their level." [my emphasis].

However, the appearance of equality of aggregates was not only important for domestic consumption, but also assumed to matter for international audiences too. The international response to the SALT I treaty provided a discursive resource for legitimating the priority of equal aggregates in SALT II. For instance, the Secretary of Defence, Schlesinger recounted a conversation he had with the Japanese minister of defence about SALT I, as anecdotal evidence for theorizing why equal aggregates were crucial: "He asked me why we accepted an unequal agreement in 1972. I answered him that we had a technological advantage. But this is to point out that the perception is there in third parties."[329] But, Schlesinger went on, it was not only the Japanese, "there is a problem of appearance in Europe. The agreement is perceived as unequal."[330] Backing up Schlesinger, the JCS frequently emphasized perceptions of equality rather than the importance of equality per se:

> The point is that it is much more important to achieve agreement on equal aggregates of central systems, even at the 2500 level, than it is to accept an agreement which is asymmetrically in favor of the Soviets in numbers of launchers. 4. I believe that the approach outlined above is the maximum initiative that can be taken without undue risk. Further, it: a. Reflects the firm US resolve with regard to non-central systems; b. *Incorporates equal aggregates*

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[327] Forward Based Systems: the nuclear weapons in Europe that were capable of hitting the Soviet Union.
[328] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, October 7, 1974, 2:55–4:35 p.m.
[329] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, October 18, 1974, 3:40–5:45 p.m.
[330] Ibid

and will, therefore, protect our standing with third countries, our allies and our adversaries. Provides for essential equivalence from a military as well as political image point of view.[331]

Finally, both President Ford and Nixon also raised concerns about how various audiences would interpret any deal that did not appear equal. At a National Security Council meeting in 1973, President Nixon asserted that the US must take into account how SALT "*appear[s]* to other countries, since this is what affects our foreign policy."[332] His Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, agreed: "Our SALT Two agreement can't result in serious inequalities in numbers of delivery vehicles, if for no other reason than that other countries *will look at these differences* and assume we are inferior. Therefore, it will affect our foreign policy."[333] All these bring to mind Robert Gilpin's famous claim, that prestige rather than power is the "everyday currency" of international politics. These quotes also clearly embody the grammar of status competition. The rules of the competition are simple: inferior and superior statuses in the international hierarchy of power are represented to derive from the relative number of nuclear weapons each superpower is allowed under the treaty. Fail to get equality in number, they *theorize*, will jeopardize the US's influence with other countries, even if by their own "strategic" calculations such numerical differences would not matter. In short, interest in influence, collapses into interest in international status.

Thus, the seemingly reasonable demand for "equality", produced a fear of being seen as inferior that structured the SALT II process. Although in SALT I other metrics had been taken into account and considered, the total number of launchers became *the* primary – and increasingly conventionalized— *proxy* for making this calculation during the SALT II backstage negotiations. Crucially, none of those involved in formulating the US's SALT II position earnestly argued that aggregate launchers *were* the best way of measuring either equality or assessing deterrence. Even those passionately in favour of numerical equality argued that it was needed because this was how various audiences would evaluate the US position: domestic critics in congress, the general public, as well as allies, and third party countries.[334] Rather than relying on their own assessments of what was required for

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[331] May 2, 1973: Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) Washington,

[332] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, March 8, 1973, 10:10–11:30 a.m.

[333] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, March 8, 1973, 10:10–11:30 a.m.

[334] International audiences are referred to rather vaguely in the SALT archives, but it is reasonable to infer that it referred primarily NATO allies in Europe, which the US's so-called nuclear umbrella was supposed to protect. The shade provided by the umbrella had been cast in to severe doubt once the Soviets had developed the capacity to strike the US mainland. As De Gaulle famously noted, it was hard to believe the US would sacrifice San

deterrence, numerical equality was the standard by which they expected the treaty would be judged, and this provided the baseline for how they reasoned that any given negotiating position would affect the domestic and international perceptions of the US's status and thus any the social privileges associated with that position. From my grammar of status perspective, it does not matter whether their analysis was correct; it only matters that this representation of international and domestic audience's criteria for assessing US/Soviet relative performance is what legitimated the US government's insistence upon total equal aggregates.

The salient question then is how did this concern for status affect arms control? The conservative answer is that at a minimum it made arms control considerably more difficult—and the process longer—than if the administration had only gone by their own "strategic" calculations. Again and again during the first two years of the SALT II negotiations, the US position hit up against the Russian refusal to accept the equal aggregate principle. It is not an exaggeration to say that this was *the* sticking point that held up negotiations. However, as a result of the Soviet position, the US demand for equal aggregates had to be defended and legitimated at National Security Council and Verification Panel meetings as the US sought to find compromise. These discussions give a direct window into the both value that was said to constitute the value of equal numbers. It is in this context that Kissinger[335] sent a memorandum to the President Ford during the preparations for the Vladivostok agreement, that weighed up the perceived pay-off of pushing for equal aggregates:

> [The]aggregates in Brezhnev's proposal essentially comes down to 2400 launchers for the Soviets versus 2200 for the U.S. In strategic or programmatic terms, such an arrangement would present few difficulties; the problem with it is political in that it might not provide the "perception of equality"[336] [...]

Francisco to protect Paris. However, international audiences also likely refer to the "Third World" states the superpowers were competing to woo, and other allies such as Japan.

[335] Kissinger had been a sceptic towards the demand for equal aggregates. Less than a month earlier he had expressed doubt that the domestic and international audiences could be assumed to be so simpleminded, writing in a memorandum to President Ford that: "Secretary Schlesinger and the JCS have argued strongly, as has Senator Jackson, that we must have absolute equality in the number of central system launchers. They argue that any inequality will lead to a widespread perception that the US has accepted a position of inferiority. There are serious questions concerning the validity of this argument. In particular: —I do not believe the Congress, the American people, or our Allies have such a simplistic view of the strategic balance that they ignore all considerations other than the number of missiles and bombers." Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford Washington, October 18, 1974.

[336] Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford Washington, undated [but going by the chronology of what it discussed, it must have been late October 1974]

Beyond the fact that by his own account, the difference was of negligible strategic value, it is noticeable how equality could not be rough, but *exact* to the final detail. The appearance of equality in aggregates was all or nothing: it could not be qualified, offset, nor weighed up against other objectives. As a result, the equality in aggregates, took on a value quite independent from and disproportionate to what were considered to be its military implications. This seemingly curious obsession with equal numbers—down to the final launcher—makes sense from a status perspective, as Wohlforth (2009, p.33) notes, "[o]nce linked to status, easily divisible issues that theoretically provide opportunities for linkages and side payments of various sorts may themselves be seen as indivisible and thus unavailable as avenues for possible intermediate bargains." Rather than being able to bargain away a trivial difference in number, the US was stuck insisting upon it. At the very least, this suggests that the US insistence on equal aggregate launchers held up the process and as I will argue shortly, it deprived the US of a bargaining chip that could have been used to attain other important goals.

However, to make the claim that the high social value – international and domestic audience perception of equality depended upon the nuclear aggregate— emerged out of SALT I and was *the* salient reason for insisting upon numerical equality, we must address a looming counter argument. One could try to argue that the external strategic situation had caused this change: because the Soviet's had not yet developed MIRVs and because bombers were excluded from the aggregate, the US could more readily accept inequality at SALT I.[337] However, this argument cannot explain why the US did not just insist upon equal aggregates in *MIRVed* missiles rather than equal aggregates in all missiles. Indeed, this option was feasible in terms of verification and openly considered.[338] As Kissinger explained to Ford "On the Soviet side, the extra 200 launchers they would be permitted would consist entirely of unMIRVed missiles, since neither side could have more than 1320 MIRVed missiles."[339] Moreover, as Kissinger went on, "Given the tremendous difference in military capability between MIRVed missiles and single warhead missiles, these 200 launchers would be worth

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[337] It is worth noting that while the Soviets were catching up with MIRVs, the US had developed a new qualitative advantage in cruise missiles which, akin to MIRVs during SALT I, allowed their long-range bombers to penetrate the Soviet Air defences in a manner that they had not been able to do previously.

[338] One might be tempted to suggest that given the problems with verifying MIRVs that counting the balance via launchers was a practical solution to the counting problem. However, the national means of verification by satellite had reached the point whereby the US could distinguish between missile types, and which ones had been tested with MIRVs. The final agreement was thus able to keep a MIRV sublimit within the launcher limits, by assuming that whatever missiles had been tested with MIRV and deployed, were counted as MIRVed.

[339] Meanwhile, even to reach 2200, according to Kissinger, the US would "have to retain some combination of 224 obsolete Polaris missiles and B–52 bombers. To go above 2200, we would have to retain even more obsolete systems (at high operating costs), or build additional Tridents and B–1s (at very high procurement costs)."

very little in strategic terms." [340] At this point, one might expect that the US could try to leverage the fact that the Soviets were pushing for a strategically trivial advantage in aggregate numbers. Instead, Kissinger advised the opposite: "Nevertheless, given the adverse political reaction you might suffer if you accepted this disparity in launchers, I believe we must press Brezhnev to accept numerical equality."[341]

These discussions at the NSC also provides more specifics on what was considered to be the value of equal aggregates in launchers and MIRVs. Interestingly, ensuring relative equality in MIRVed missiles was *not* considered by the military to be a priority. At a NSC meeting prior to Vladivostok the Defence Secretary, Jim Schlesinger – a long term advocate of equal launcher aggregates—specified what constituted the relative value of equality in launchers versus equality in MIRVed missiles. Echoing the nuclear sufficiency discourse of McNamara, he argued in an NSC meeting that "Once you are over about 600 to 700 MIRVed missiles, the additional 300 have considerably less value. I would be less inclined to trade off the visually very important equality in aggregates to get 300 less MIRVed missiles [...]If the U.S. is perceived as being unequal in numbers, it would be very harmful. But the political perceptions are not so strong on numbers of MIRV missiles." In other words, Schlesinger argues that the extra MIRVs would only make the rubble bounce. Therefore, although MIRVed missiles were several factors more powerful and generally had more strategic utility than un-mirved missiles,[342] beyond the 700 missile threshold diminishing returns rapidly set in. Therefore, because superiority in launchers aggregate was more symbolically valuable domestically and internationally, it would be worthwhile to accept relative inferiority in MIRVed missiles for relative numerical superiority in total aggregates.

Ultimately, maintaining equality in launchers had taken on a higher social value between SALT I and SALT II. However, this higher estimation was not constituted by new military utility, but by new appreciation – agreement around a theory – of how domestic and international audiences would perceive any agreement with unequal aggregates. The fall-out from SALT I, both domestically and internationally had established the salience of "equality"

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[340] Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford Washington, undated.

[341] As the next section will suggest, among the casualties of prioritising equal aggregates was the administration's prior strategic goal to seek equal throw-weight and to stop the Soviet's from developing heavy-missiles that could threaten the US ICBMs. See: Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford Washington, undated.

[342] Because of their capacity to overcome ABMs and the fact that one missile could take out several missiles, they were far more suitable for a counter-force strike

and the audience's preferred means of measuring it: launchers. In this way, domestic and international audiences set the rules of the nuclear status competition.

Opportunities Lost: Agreement reached at Vladivostok

Ultimately, President Ford did not take any chances with international or domestic perceptions and insisted on both equal aggregates of MIRVed and unMIRVed missiles going into Vladivostok. The agreement established that the US and Soviet Union would be permitted a total of 2400 launchers with no more than 1320 MIRVed missiles. To estimate the opportunity costs of prioritizing symbolic equality by pursuing equality of launchers requires counter factual analysis. Reviewing the process of the negotiations, I argue that the US's insistence upon equal aggregates a) delayed the negotiations and ultimately the signing and b) sacrificed other strategic goals in order to insist upon strict numerical equality. However, for this counterfactual to be plausible, it is necessary to demonstrate that that the US negotiators were aware that the Soviet's prized the symbolic value of numerical advantages.

First of all, it is clear that the US administration believed the Soviets placed a high value on aggregate launchers because it was believed to be crucial to maintain the *perception* of strength. The following snippet of conversation between the US's chief SALT negotiator (Johnson), the Secretary of State (Kissinger), and the Defence Secretary (Schlesinger) at a national security meeting in the months leading up to the Vladivostok summit, illustrates how this idea was accepted across key actors on the US side of the SALT negotiations :

> Ambassador Johnson: [Soviets]They will always choose the higher aggregates.[343]
> They want a perception of a higher aggregate—
> Secretary Schlesinger: Exactly the reason why we want equal aggregates.
> Secretary Kissinger: I think they want the perception of the higher
> aggregates more for their own internal bureaucracy rather than for third countries.[344]

Indeed, among the President and his leading staff, the Soviet concern for the appearance of strength was taken as commonsensical. Indeed, in the background papers and in Verification Panel and NSC meetings, when the Soviet position and objectives were discussed, their

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[343] In this context, it is clear they are referring to aggregate launchers, not MIRVs.
[344] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, October 18, 1974, 3:40–5:45 p.m.

concern for "appearing ahead"[345], "visible power"[346], and "obsession"[347] with equality were frequent refrains. Moreover, the NSC discussed positions prior to Vladivostok that recognized that some negotiation advantages could be gained from allowing the Soviets to have a trivial lead in aggregate launchers. After floating two negotiating position options with "offsetting asymmetries": allowing the Soviet's a lead in total aggregates in return for a lower limit on MIRV, the first advantage Kissinger outlined was that "that it may be more negotiable than equal aggregates".[348] The major downside meanwhile was that "unequal aggregates might mean that some would perceive a U.S. inferiority."[349] In short, Kissinger considered it easier to negotiate because they believed the Soviet's valued the perception of superiority. Ultimately, President Ford chose to persist with insisting upon equal aggregates, and forego the gains that might have been available by leveraging Soviet preferences for a symbolic lead in aggregates.

Beyond merely slowing down the negotiations, other strategic goals were sacrificed in order to prioritize strict numerical aggregates. From the outset of SALT II, the US Verification Panel and NSC meetings had frequently expressed the goal to stop or at least limit the deployment of the Soviet's SS-18 heavy ICBMs.[350] The heavy ICBM was considered strategically important because it potentially had the capability to deliver high yield warheads that the US military believed would be capable of breaching the hardened silos of the US's ICBMs. Indeed, the vulnerability of the US's ICBM's was a long-term matter of strategic concern and fueled public anxiety about a threat of a first strike (E.g. Nitze, 1976, p.220-222). Given that prior to Vladivostok, both backstage and frontstage, the administration had set a goal to ban or at least limit these weapons, it is all the more remarkable – and indicative of the high symbolic value they attached to exact equality in numbers— that when the issue arose at Vladivostok that the US chose not press home the issue even when it appeared the Soviets were divided.[351] Instead they explicitly preferred to prioritize equal aggregates on

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[345] In the extended quote from the Defence Secretary Schlesinger is instructive: "It's our expectation that they want to get an advantage in strategic weapons.[…] The Soviets probably want to appear ahead for political and psychological reasons. March 8, 1973: Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington.

[346] Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency Washington, May 3, 1977.

[347] For instance, a national intelligence memorandum argued about the Soviets that "In their view, the SALT process is one of the means for: —registering and reinforcing the *co-equal superpower status* of the USSR; —keeping the Soviet Union in the forefront of US foreign policy and security concerns; —maintaining the strategic nuclear balance as the crux of US–Soviet relations, thus overshadowing Soviet disadvantages in other aspects of the global competition with the United States, e.g., economics, technology." National Intelligence Memorandum1 NIM 77–025 Washington, September 19, 1977. (my emphasis)

[348] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, October 18, 1974, 3:40–5:45 p.m.

[349] Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, October 18, 1974, 3:40–5:45 p.m.

[350] It had also been a matter of public concern for conservatives (Caldwell, 1991, p. 285)

[351] 88. Memorandum of Conversation1 Vladivostok, November 24, 1974, 10:10 a.m.

total launchers with an equal limit on MIRVs.[352] Nonetheless, the administration were delighted by the outcome. In the NSC meeting a fortnight following Vladivostok the consensus among participants – somewhat unusually – all agreed that the outcome was a triumph. As Ford put it, "The main accomplishment" of Vladivostok "was that we went from nonequivalence to equivalence. We agreed on a limit of 2400 on the aggregates and 1320 on the number of MIRV missiles." In short, the long-term strategic goal of limiting the large ICBMs had been sacrificed to pursue the symbolically important equality in launchers. Indeed, there is a certain irony that the US administration considered the Soviet's to be "obsessed with equality", yet were blind to the social value they placed upon the same thing.[353] Indeed, as we saw, the US could have pursued strategic goals more effectively or tied up an agreement sooner had they not prioritised the symbolic value of relative numerical equality.

It would take another four years for SALT II treaty to be signed. Partly this was because nailing down the technical questions – how to count the aggregate, when to begin counting, and how to ensure verifiability—was extremely complex and hamstrung by each side's negotiators striving for marginal gains. Moreover, the JCS and Defense Secretary Schlesinger threw several major spanners into the works by insisting upon counting the Soviet's Backfire bomber in the aggregate, and attempting to avoid any limits on cruise missiles.[354] However, with the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, *cetarus paribus* one might have expected that a President that explicitly supported for disarmament and opposed nuclear weapons, would make arms control negotiations easier. Instead President Carter set back the process months if not years. To a large extent the archive material supports the conventional narrative for how Carter's administration inadvertently hindered SALT II and why it was ultimately never put before the Senate for ratification (Caldwell, 1991). For instance, the archives indicate how the transition wrought a loss of expertise and institutional memory that disrupted the negotiation process. In particular, the transition made possible President Carter's opening faux pas, which called for far deeper cuts to the overall aggregates than had hitherto been agreed at Vladivostok.[355] It is easy to see in retrospect how he stumbled into this and why the Soviet's took umbrage. The Carter team then wasted

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[352] Memorandum of Conversation Vladivostok, November 24, 1974, 10:10 a.m.
[353] Memorandum From William Hyland of the National Security Council Staff to Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff
[354] The Backfire was a new Soviet bomber which the US intelligence estimated could reach the US on a one-way mission. The Soviet's refuted the US range and thus it became a major public sticking point from 1975-1979.
[355] Memorandum From President Carter to Secretary of State Vance and the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (Warnke)

considerable time and effort and arguing with the Soviets over whether to count cruise missiles launched from bombers as MIRVed missiles, unaware and unable to believe that they were reneging on what had been suggested by the previous administration.[356] The conventional story has it that all this dawdling led to external events catching up with the administration (the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan), and had the administration moved faster, they would likely have been able to get SALT II through congress (Caldwell, 1991).

I do not disagree, but would add that the whole process was also hindered by President Carter's insistence upon equal aggregates. Indeed, early in the process the President established a priority of equal aggregates using the language of "balance". Again, this was explicitly domestically driven, for instance he outlined in 1977 that "we must maintain an overall balance in order for the American people and Congress to accept it. It has to be balanced."[357] This was also explicitly the rationale the Carter administration used when trying to legitimate the treaty to the public following the signing. If anything, the Carter administration questioned the requirement for equal aggregates less than his predecessors. Unlike the previous administration(s), which had brought the matter up for discussion, the archives show no evidence that anything other than equal aggregates was ever considered. Indeed, it appears that by 1976, equality had been specified and reified as the standard by which equality would be judged. Thus, although President Carter certainly strove for the goal of fewer nuclear weapons, he had a-priori ruled out the only negotiating chip he had available for achieving it.

To be sure, the US demand for equality did not directly jeopardize its security,[358] but it added a major additional hindrance to arms control. As Paul Nitze stated in the preliminary SALT II meetings, the US was attempting to achieve "Equality in reality *and* in appearance."[359] Clearly they were not the same thing; moreover, negotiating a deal that *appeared* equal was an additional complicating factor that became a constant sticking point with the Soviets.

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[356] See President Carter discussing how he saw now record of the idea of counting ALCM equipped bombers as MIRV: Memorandum of Conversation Washington, September 23, 1977, 10:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. Yet, for example, the NSC meeting of 1976, reports an offer to "count heavy bombers with 600–2500 kilometer ALCMs in the 1320 MIRV ceiling" - Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, July 30, 1976, 9:30–11 a.m.

[357] Memorandum of Conversation of a Meeting of the National Security Council Washington, March 22, 1977, 4–5:25 p.m.

[358] Though assessing matters in retrospect and more broadly, the failure of SALT II probably contributed to the decline of detente, the rise of Reagan and the onset of the "second Cold War". Meanwhile, anti-nuclearists would argue that the high levels of nuclear weapons permitted under SALT I and II put the US at a higher risk of accidental nuclear war.

[359] Minutes of a Meeting of the Verification Panel Washington, August 15, 1973, 3:04–4:31 p.m.

Thus, although there remained considerable technical and political labour to come on how to define equal and what should be included in the aggregate, the status value attached to relative equality in launchers pre-structured this technical wrangling and thus dramatically slowed negotiations.

Relative Gains and "Winning" the Negotiations:

Another crucial mechanism by which status concerns hindered and held up negotiations was that the negotiations themselves became constituted as a sporting contest. Not unlike how Onuf (1989, p.283) suggests the Cold War became treated as a "contest and spectacle—an *unending* tournament" with several rounds of play, so too did the SALT become treated as a sport or a game[360]in which there had to be winners and losers, who would enjoy public acclaim or suffer public shaming accordingly. Indeed, this is certainly how President Nixon argued that international and especially domestic publics understood SALT:

> Needless to say, as you recall, after our China trip, they took a communiqué,3 which had very little to do with substance, but the whole—but many said, "Who won? Who lost?" Well, in a way because that was a good deal for both sides. But, in this instance, this is a highly substantive matter, as you know. And everybody is going to be watching the darn thing. Who won? Who lost? Is the United States in an inferior position to the Soviet Union? Did we get, you know, suckered here by these people and the rest?[361]

Indeed, as President Nixon explained to Laird and Smith during SALT I negotiations, not only did the US have to worry about getting a deal "that is sound" but "that about half of this battle—maybe a little more than half—it's got to appear that way. It's got to appear that way."[362]

A similar symbolic cost emerged around making concessions. Indeed, not only did the US negotiating team take into account whether a concession would be worthwhile, but they needed to consider how making concession from earlier positions would look to the public.

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[360] It should be noted that various administrations also constituted the negotiations through sporting metaphors: poker, baseball, and football and even tic tac toe. However, the Tic Tac Toe reference, unlike the others, was used stress the potential pointlessness of the arms race. Smith uses it warn of danger of failing to get an ABM agreement: Conversation Among President Nixon, the Chief of the Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (Smith), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) Washington, March 21, 1972.

[361] Conversation Among President Nixon, the Chief of the Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (Smith), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)

[362] Conversation Among President Nixon, the Chief of the Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (Smith), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) Washington, March 21, 1972.

Rather than setting out a bold negotiating position that the administration could fall back from, Kissinger was explicitly concerned with avoiding providing "a check list for opponents if there is any deviation" as it "would just give them examples of how we had caved."[363] Indeed, rather than assessing the final deal on its merits, the prior history in the negotiation would be used to make a scorecard used to assess who "won". Indeed, President Carter would discover this to his cost, after he had initially proposed new reductions to the Soviets that went far beyond the limits agreed at Vladivostok. As his Security advisor explained in a private memorandum in 1977:

> First, the most dangerous dimension of the current campaign of criticism—and, in fact, the engine which powers so much of the anxiety and attacks—is the argument that we were forced to make concession after concession and gave up far more than we got. The Moscow proposal is generally held up as the measure of how far we have collapsed. For much of the public and many on the Hill, this is the level at which they evaluate what has been done—not the specifics of the agreement[364].

Compounding and constituting the cost of concessions was a masculinized discourse of needing to look tough and strong rather than soft and weak.[365] The upshot of this concern with looking weak and backing down was an outsized and even perverse obsession with details. Concerned with limiting relative losses on the record, the negotiations often spent time haggling over what both sides recognized as trivialities. For instance, while Kissinger freely admitted to the Soviet's that their near obsolete diesel powered submarines were of trivial strategic significance, the US could not let it go because of how it would look to their domestic critics.[366] Later, when the Carter administration was trying to finalize SALT II, a sticking point became whether the US would be allowed to have 27 or 28 cruise missiles on a bomber. In a moment of gallows humour, Gromkyo made fun of the trivial nature of the Soviet and American disagreement noting that the "difference was so slight that the public would be amused if it were published."[367] The irony here is that a significant part of why the US was such a stickler for details stemmed from trying to ensure that the record would show

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[363] Minutes of a Verification Panel Meeting1 Washington, November 23, 1973.

[364] Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter Washington, November 4, 1977.

[365] Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter1 Washington, November 16, 1977.

[366] Whether and how to count the diesel submarines with short-range missiles was debated at some length, with the Soviets and backstage US meetings. See: Minutes of a Verification Panel Meeting Washington, June 7, 1972, 3:04–4:15 p.m.; Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and Assistant to the President (Haldeman); Memorandum of Conversation1 Moscow, May 25, 1972, 5:20–6:35 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.–12:32 a.m.

[367] Telegram From Secretary of State Vance to the White House Brussels, December 24, 1978, 0038Z.

how strong they had held to their positions, and how they fought to avoid concessions, no matter how trivial.

Indeed, in the latter stages of SALT I President Nixon explains why the details matter. He expected and stressed that the administration needed to be prepared for domestic opponents to undertake "a great exercise in nit-picking—who won, who got suckered, etc."[368] As his use of game theory language neatly illustrates, arguably the major risk of making relative losses was social rather than strategic: Not only did US administrations need to avoid *being* the sucker, but they needed to avoid *looking like the sucker* too. It is extremely difficult to evaluate exactly the relative effect of the social pressure to avoid the status of the sucker post SALT. A conservative conclusion would be that at the very least it slowed down negotiations. Given the conventional wisdom for why SALT II failed is timing, this is not an insignificant finding.

Conclusion

Consecutive US administration(s) SALT theorized several significant social prizes to be at stake in the nuclear arms race beyond deterrence of the Soviet Union. Reviewing the backstage SALT discussions showed how domestic and international audiences perceptions of "equality" were crucial for legitimating prioritising relative aggregate number of missiles in the SALT II negotiations. Yet the rules of this game were not fixed like the Olympics. The notion that the country which had the most launchers was superior or "winning" the nuclear arms race, was only one of several alternative ways of evaluating the race. However, the debate that followed the SALT I agreement had the downstream effect of specifying aggregate launchers as the rule by which future SALT II agreement were expected to be publicly evaluated. Moreover, even though the various administrations explicitly doubted the relevance of this measure for strategic calculations, the theory became sufficiently salient to legitimate equal aggregates becoming *the* primary objective of SALT II. Thus, out of the pubic process of SALT I emerged the rules for evaluating SALT II. The goal of "equality" and the zero sum game it produced, was explicitly not legitimated on the grounds of strategic necessity, but to ensure international and domestic audiences would not *see* the US as the sucker of SALT. This then structured the way the consecutive administrations theorized the

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[368] Memorandum for the Record Washington, March 21, 1972, 3 p.m. SUBJECT Meeting of the President with the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, March 21, 1972, 3:00 p.m. in the Cabinet Room

social prizes at stake in SALT. Ultimately, the emergence of this "equality" rule would lead the US to take negotiating positions that significantly slowed down SALT II and thus contributed to its ultimate failure. Thus, the chapter provides evidence that can help contest the common notion that the cold war arms race was primarily a tragedy born of the security dilemma. Instead I argue that a full account of the post-MAD arms race must include international and domestic status concerns, which produced *additional* social and political costs upon being seen to fall behind in the arms race, quite besides worries about a "bolt from the blue" attack. While the US negotiators were indeed obsessed with relative gains, it was the result of a status hierarchy that had emerged around SALT, the rules of which were to a significant degree of the United States' own making.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that status was prioritized *instead* of deterrence. Rather, I argue that status was prioritized *on top* of deterrence, adding a powerful incentive to prioritise *one particular* – and strategically questionable— means of assessing relative gains, which in turn, significantly hindered and slowed the SALT II negotiations. Moreover, the "absolute weapon" discourse did not lose all salience. The various administrations frequently expressed confidence that the risk of a Soviet attack was minimal, and expressed little outward concern that deterrence would fail if they did not match the Soviets numbers. Hence, the advocates of numerical equality frequently talked about *perceptions* of strength, *perceptions* of balance, *perceptions* of inferiority. This spoke to a tacit assumption that the US already had sufficient nuclear capability, it was just that the rest of world and domestic society who could not be trusted to understand it. Thus, this chapter contests the way we think of status and security as an "either or" motivation. Instead, maintaining status *is* what constitutes security when it comes to maximising influence among allies and keeping the domestic audience happy.

This chapter also allows us to mount a defence of the dogmatic army general of popular imagination. Generals are always preparing to fight the last war; the old aphorism runs. As conservative as they are dogmatic, they prepare to attack on horses when they should practice sitting in trenches. This tendency is usually deemed at best inefficient and at worst tragic. Yet, the preceding analysis can shine a more sympathetic light upon our imaginary generals. Deterring enemies requires they appreciate the implications of waging war. Maintaining allies requires they appreciate the *potential* of one's military power. Indeed, deterrence and deference do not depend upon what would *really* happen in war. Instead, it is social: it depends upon what others theorize would occur and this may not be the same thing. If your enemies and allies are preparing for the last war, then deterrence of the enemy and ally loyalty will

require the prudent general to do so too. Indeed, although the US military and Secretary of Defence accepted that the relative aggregate number of launchers had been rendered moot strategically, because this was the salient criteria by which international and domestic audience evaluated military position, they could not afford to ignore it. In short, the US generals had to prepare for the last war *and* the next war at the same time.

Finally, the chapter highlights the utility of the grammar of status as a framework for analysis. Leaving concern for motivations behind, allowed the chapter to zoom in on how the rules and the prizes of the nuclear status competition emerged, were contested, and eventually solidified in US top-level discourse. Of particular theoretical interest here is the term "equality". It highlights how the logic of status competition can come cloaked in seemingly unobjectionable moral language. It scarcely needs mentioning that "equality" as an ideal enjoyed common sense appeal beyond nuclear affairs. As Krause and Latham (1998, p. 30) note US arms control policy discourse embodied "cultural predisposition to see 'balance' as being inherently good". Yet, Jackson's demand for "equality" in the context of SALT nonetheless produced a competitive status hierarchy: constituted the US as "inferior" while simultaneously legitimating measures to remedy that inequality. Moreover, baked into Jackson's demand was a rule for measuring equality, one that was not only eminently contestable but lacked a strategic rationale. However, rather than attempting to contest the dubious definition of equality and the rules of the game it produced, consecutive administrations preferred to follow and reinforce it instead. Therefore, this chapter showcases how the grammar of status can illuminate the "code" words by which the logic of status competition is invoked and rules specified, but without the words status needing to be uttered as a rationale.

Conclusion

Domesticating "International" Status

This thesis has tackled the central paradox facing status researchers: Status seeking abounds in world politics, yet the status hierarchies within which status is sought are notoriously difficult to empirically ascertain. Indeed, in laying out the challenge for would be status researchers, Wohlforth (2009, p.38) explained why status hierarchies elude the analyst: "Status is a social, psychological, and cultural phenomenon. Its expression appears endlessly varied; it is thus little wonder that the few international relations scholars who have focused on it are more struck by its variability and diversity than by its susceptibility to generalization." This remains the methodological puzzle facing status researchers today: How can we systematically identify international status hierarchies and their effects when we see them?[369] Robert Gilpin (1981, p.33) alludes to the size of the challenge when he argued that the difficulty involved in assessing international status makes it "ultimately, an imponderable". This dissertation does not aver. Instead, it has sought to make a strength out this difficulty: because states, statesmen and citizens care about and pursue status *despite* its difficulty to assess, I argued we can study international status hierarchies via actors' ponderings of the imponderable. Indeed, states and citizens must grapple with the same status ambiguity with which status scholars struggle. Thus, this dissertation's crucial methodological and theoretical move was to redirect investigations from unobservable international status hierarchies and onto the *theories* of international status (TIS) that states, governments, civil society and citizens use to make sense of those alleged hierarchies.

I contended that not only is it likely that different states disagree about the nature of international hierarchies and produce rival TIS, but that domestic actors can and do produce divergent theories of their own state's international status. In other words, the ambiguity around international status is productive of rival theories of international status that may be made, remade, and perhaps dwindle in salience within domestic politics. Moreover, and contra the existing literature, I argued that these domestically produced TIS do not require international acceptance to become salient and influential. Instead, I argued they only need

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[369] And in my cause; without reifying the rules of the hierarchy prior to analysis.

be credible to the target audience in order to help or hinder the legitimation of particular policies.

These theoretical expectations provided the premise and the promise of studying the TIS that domestic actors use and act upon. However, were any one of these TIS internationally hegemonic, my approach would only provide a second hand means of apprehending status. It would be the equivalent of investigating the outcome of the Olympics by listening to the commentary; it would work, but it would be better to just watch the action live. Therefore, to demonstrate the usefulness of my theoretical assumptions and the value of the approach they inspired, I needed to (1) develop a new framework for identifying theories of status and how they change and become contested, and (2) illustrate how this approach can provide novel and sophisticated insights into how international status hierarchies affect government policy.

This framework constituted the primary theoretical contribution of my thesis. Indeed, the ontological shift[370] needed to go from studying international status to investigating the TIS, required considerable conceptual labour in order to develop a "thick-constructivist" status-framework: changing the locus of action from motivation to legitimation, and the ontological status of international hierarchies from collective beliefs to representations (chapter 1-2). While this move went a long way to solving the conventional methodological puzzle facing status scholars, it beget a new one: How can such status hierarchies be analysed systematically if one begins from the premise that status is inherently contestable and open to different interpretations? To meet this challenge, I first narrowed down my theoretical concern to a particular type of status dynamic: status competition. I then posited a new framework for identifying its logic as it manifests in discourse: what I called the *grammar of status competition*. To do this, I used the Olympics – the archetypal international status competition – to model the essential features of a status competition and to extract its distinct processual-relational logic. The logic of status competition, I argued, is substantially different from the logics underpinning different types of status-seeking – striving to enter a club and resisting domination.[371] I then theorized three "grammatical units", which upon utterance, always instantiate the logic of status competition: relative comparisons, positional identities, and sports metaphors.

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[370] Two steps were crucial to this move: instead of treating status as a distinct motivation, I treat status competition as distinct logic of legitimation. Second, instead of treating the international status hierarchy as existing in people's heads – collective beliefs – I treated international hierarchies as discursive

[371] I also distinguished the logic of status competition from other logics that can be used from legitimation: abstract-rule following, individual utility maximisation, and securitization.

This grammar of status provided a heuristic device for identifying theories of international status competition within discourse. It thus enables the systematic empirical study of whether and how such renderings are used to (de)legitimate particular policies within domestic politics. Further, because the grammar of status is contingent upon the relations formed through its grammar, rather than the substance of the hierarchy, it opened up the possibility to analyse change in the rules of the hierarchy. To generate analytical purchase and explore the plausibility of whether and how particular theories of international status changed and/or were contested across time, it was therefore essential that I treated theorizing status competition as a discursive *process*. Thus, I investigated the iterative process by which domestic groups theorized the status hierarchy (1) prior to a policy, (2) while it was being undertaken, and (3) how they evaluated it afterward. In particular, I was sceptical about the "rules of the game" remaining constant (like they are in the Olympics[372]). Here the grammar of status framework was used to identify how rules of particular hierarchies changed, were contested or remained stable, and above all, the consequences of these TIS'. I used this procedure on three purposefully different cases – Norwegian education policy reforms, the UK's legitimation of the Boer War, and the US negotiating positions during SALT I & II— in order to showcase the transferability of my framework and provide insights about how status hierarchies informed the respective outcomes in each case.

Drawing upon my cases, the next section answers the questions: How does the grammar of status framework contribute to the study of status in world politics? What sort of research agenda does a TIS framework enable that was hitherto foreclosed? Indeed, if one accepts that my grammar of status framework did indeed provide useful insights into the cases, I contend that this would have major implications for status research in IR.

Domesticating "International" Status: A Research Agenda

While a TIS-approach departs quite radically from pioneering and dominant approaches to status, it is useful to clarify how it diverges from its nearest and dearest theoretical antecedents. Although several works theorize the domestic, and sometimes discourse, they still analytically privilege "international" actions in their model. For instance, Steven Ward has done most to lay the ground work for theorizing and investigating the domestic audiences

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[372] Here, the rules to remain the same and only position changes as the competition unfolds

and discourses. However, Ward's approach is a "2ⁿᵈ image reversed" theory whereby acts of international denial trigger status concerns in citizens that domestic actors exploit in domestic politics. Further, Ward's approach remains grounded in social identity theory and thus requires inferring motivations.[373] Conversely, my approach has much in common with "international" sociological theories, which are also ambivalent about motivations. Here, that international/systemic factors – e.g. norms (Towns, 2010; Towns & Rumelili, 2017) or the rules governing the entrance to international status clubs (Naylor, 2018), or relations of amity/enmity among neighbouring countries (Røren, 2019) – explain particular status seeking behaviours. Not unlike Ward's oeuvre, Ann Town's path-breaking work on the social pressures exerted by international hierarchies, partly inspired my TIS approach. Towns (2010, 2012) theorizes that international norms produce hierarchies that exert social pressure upon those placed low, thereby explaining how normative change often occurs "from below". My TIS approach shares Towns foregrounding of rules, however her theory illuminates general patterns of state behaviour and normative change, whereas my TIS approach analytically prioritises domestic interpretative agency rather than international social pressure.

Indeed, I treat international status as a sociological phenomenon (remaining ambivalent about motivations), while at the same time granting causal priority to domestic factors (the discursive (re)production of theories about international status) rather than *international* social pressures, acts of recognition, or incentives. While international goings on are not ignored in my approach, they have no privileged status as a factor informing which particular TIS become influential in domestic politics. Although taking this approach may appear like a lonely enterprise within "status" research,[374] considering at thick constructivist frameworks in IR more broadly, I stand in good company. For instance, Lene Hansen (2006) foreign policy-identity framework bears a close family resemblance,[375] so too does Adler-Nissen's stigma-inspired hierarchy-framework (Adler-Nissen, 2017). The common analytical move that makes these approaches possible, is treating language as productive rather than

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[373] This is also puts blue water between my work and domestic-psychological theories, which explain international status seeking by reference to domestic factors and psychological needs. For instance, Ann Clunan's theorization of how Russia's status seeking strategy needed to "fit" with elite's historical conception of Russia's historical role. Clunan relies upon SIT here and thus, the drive to pursue status in the first place is provided by an innate motivation for status. Likewise, Freedman (2015) builds upon social psychology to argue that China has a distinct – domestically produced –ontology for comprehending its status in the world and that this explains its status dissatisfaction. Again, the theory explains behaviour by reference to internal-feelings.

[374] Though perhaps not for much longer (See: Røren, 2020; Yu-Ting Lin and Katada, 2020)

[375] As Chapter II's references should make clear.

reflective; this implies that the referent by which actors justify their actions is internal – intertextual-- to other discourses rather than necessarily "out there" in international relations. One reasonable objection then could be that TIS should not be a-priori limited to the domestic: they extend as far as they are found in discourse and discourses cannot (and should not) be fixed into one level of analysis (Hansen, 2006). Indeed, discourses can and do cross borders. However, as I argued in the introduction, discourses about national status – like those about national identity—often do not travel well. Thus, pragmatically speaking, a TIS approach is *likely* but not inevitably a domestic framework.[376]

This begs the question: why should status research pursue a TIS? The value of this approach hinges upon the degree of agreement about the nature of international status hierarchies at the domestic level. Where domestic groups have interpretative agency to exploit ambiguities about international status hierarchies, I would expect them to be able to contest and/or remake the rules with consequential effects upon legitimation. Chapters IV-VI demonstrated how to study this interpretive-agency: via longitudinal analysis of domestic discourse. However, my approach will offer less insight when and where the rules of an international status competition are well-defined and accepted, as in the Olympics. In the introduction, I provided a theoretical argument for why agreement about the nature of the international hierarchy is likely to be quite rare. While my empirical cases cannot be *generalized*, they do confirm that it is *possible* for rival theories of international status to change, become contested, and to influence outcomes in the manner I theorized. As such these cases would be better understood as "plausibility probes" into whether such an approach is worthwhile pursuing in other cases. In my view, the probe came out positive and as such it points towards the fruitfulness of and developing a research agenda exploring theories of international status.

The Promise of a TIS Research agenda

Such a move to studying TIS both broadens and parochialises the horizons of status research. On the one hand, a TIS approach is humbler about the ontological status of international hierarchies: theories of international hierarchies extend their influence only as far as the

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[376] My grammar of status framework could theoretically be used to analyse how any group which exists among more than one other group and undertakes some kind of collective action that requires legitimation. I would argue that international society has some specific features that make it particularly suitable for TIS analysis: the fact that group members are generally all aware of the existence of other groups, consider those groups consequential, yet except for a few select representatives (political class) seldom interact in settings whereby their respective state's status among other states would be easy to ascertain.

discourse within which they are manifested. In this sense, my TIS approach parochializes status research, but also puts it on firmer empirical footing – analysing discourses rather than beliefs, legitimation rather than motivation. On the other hand, and crucially, investigating TIS' expands the range of activities that a status framework can help account for. I will now elaborate why and how this opens up productive avenues for further research. To be clear, my overarching analytical move to investigating TIS, can be unmoored from the specific analytical toolkit I developed: It is quite possible to study effects of TIS without using my grammar of status framework.

First, a TIS approach can generate analytical traction upon policies that are ostensibly aimed at improving status, yet seem poorly designed to improve international status. Trump's "make America great again" discourse is the paradigmatic example here. Indeed, Trump's theorizing of international hierarchies bears little resemblance to those found in the IR status literature. For instance, the longest standing status research agenda that looks into how "status deficits" or "discrepancies" prompt feelings of dissatisfaction (Renshon, 2016) or frustration (Volgy, et al. 2011) would struggle to understand why Americans might find Trump's narrative compelling. Yet, as Trump illustrates, such TIS can be mobilized to legitimate policies that are ill-suited to increase what status scholars consider to be international status. A TIS approach overcomes this problem because it allows the empirical study of such status theories and their effects, without requiring international hierarchies to provide the determining referent. In the process, a TIS approach offers the advantage of addressing Mercer's riddle (chapter IV): why states seek status even when the international gains are often ephemeral and possibility illusionary? To be sure, higher international status is welcome if it comes, but as Trump shows, domestic audiences can take pride and the government can generate legitimacy among its supporters even if international recognition is not forthcoming. In this sense, just like the Brits during the first part of the Boer war (Chapter IV), many states may well theorize, compete and win in status hierarchies partly of their own making. A TIS approach renders such status "illusions" rational, tractable, and amenable to analysis.

Second, a TIS framework also provides insight into activities where the policy outcome appears rational by conventional theories, yet required legitimation in reference to status hierarchies. As I have already noted, a great deal of prior status research uses conventional rationalist theories as a baseline and use status to explain the excess. This produces what I call a *rationalist baseline bias*: it a-prior grants conventional rationalist theories privileged

status that – especially mainstream security theories—do not warrant.[377] As I showed, by doing a longitudinal analysis and using a status competition ideal type baseline, the grammar of status framework provided useful insights into how theories of status informed outcomes, without relying on a materialist rationalist baseline. This procedure allowed me to highlight how references to the PISA hierarchy were necessary to the legitimation of a raft of ostensibly "rational" reforms, as well as how the rules of the superpower nuclear hierarchy only became solidified backstage through the process of negotiating SALT. In short, this TIS approach help explain the size and shape of policies that one could post-hoc claim were conventionally rational, and thus would remain overlooked by status theories that explain only the residue other theories leave behind. Therefore, "the gap" that TIS can investigate here is as large as the influence that TIS have had upon outwardly rational policies. This will have to await further empirical study, but my hunch is this is a rather large lacuna.

Third, a TIS approach dramatically extends the range domains that a status lens can plausibly be used to account for because it does not require international inter-subjective agreement to have effects. A TIS approach only requires that the audience a particular theory of status is aimed at finds it credible and adequate to (de)legitimate a given activity. This means that we can go beyond broad brush analysis about the effects of well-established international rankings – and investigate how status theories inform action in less well-known policy domains where inter-state agreement seems (even) less likely. Counter-intuitively, by parochialising status research in this manner (limiting it to its discursive manifestations), it enables investigating the spread of particular status theories among groups within states, across borders and potentially to regions. Thus we can map and attempt to account for the travel of TIS' and their effects.

Conversely, a TIS approach also enables the systemic study of the reproduction and contestation of TIS from below. Indeed, if scholars can spot that competing for status is wasteful or undesirable, it is reasonable to assume the domestic groups can too. As my PISA and Boer cases illustrate, a TIS approach opens up for studying how domestic groups can undermine a status competition, even while other states and domestic groups continue to consider the competition valuable. Thus, by parochialising status research, TIS opens up for

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[377] My point is not that realism is always wrong; but rather the family of realism(s) that constitute this research agenda does not have a sufficiently strong empirical record of explaining or predicting international relations such that it warrants use as conventionalized baseline for analysis. See Guzzini, (1998); Gusterson, (1999) Kratochwil (1993).

two sorts of questions – illustrated by my PISA case in chapter VI – how and why do TIS manage to cross borders? How can, and how do domestic groups resist TIS? This latter question unlocks the critical potential of status research, hitherto foreclosed in theories that treat the state as unitary or as a human. Indeed, studying how groups within civil society can contest a dominant TIS, offers one promising means by which states might escape unhealthy status competitions without requiring international cooperation or accommodation (e.g Larson and Shevchenko, 2010)

Fourth, a TIS approach broadens the scope of actors that are implicated in international status seeking. For instance, chapters V illuminated how academics played a significant role in legitimating and delegitimating PISA's theory of international status within Norwegian politics. Meanwhile, Emily Hobhouse's critique of Boer War shows how civil society groups can contest governments' status theory. Indeed, a TIS approach can illuminate civil society/academia's influence upon status dynamics and make it analytically tractable. As this implies, a TIS approach implicates a number of well-known IR theories in the politics of status competition. For instance, for a TIS approach, neorealism is as much an object of analysis as a rival theory. Instead, neorealism becomes one particular, historically influential theory of international status competition. Indeed, it is scarcely controversial to note that most realists posit power *position* as a significant goal for states. In other words, these scholars posit that states should prioritize their rank in the military hierarchy among states because of the social privileges it is said to afford: security.[378] To be sure, in aid of parsimony, realists often obscure the social side of their argument, but it is not hard to excavate. For instance, John Mearsheimer (2001, p. 51) argues that states are:

> Apprehensive about the ultimate intentions of other states, and aware that they operate in a self-help system, states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system. The stronger a state is relative to its potential rivals, the less likely it is that any of those rivals will attack it and threaten its survival. Weaker states will be reluctant to pick fights with more powerful states because the weaker states are likely to suffer military defeat. Indeed, the bigger the gap in power between any two states, the less likely it is that the weaker will attack the stronger.

Yet, in order to make Mearsheimer's account into a theory of status competition, one need only add two words: "*be known* as the most powerful state in the system". While

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[378] While Neorealism is explicitly an analytical theory, those versions that maintain a rational actor assumption (e.g. Mearsheimer, 2001), it is also tacitly a normative theory of how rational states *should* behave.

Mearsheimer was undoubtedly aiming for parsimony, this adjustment is (ironically) more realistic, and indeed, necessary for the supposed social privileges that material power affords. Indeed, it is no good just being the most powerful: to deter and induce deference, one must be known as powerful. To take an example Mearsheimer would endorse; no matter how powerful a state's nuclear weapons, they cannot deter if they are kept a secret (even a Doomsday Device). Conceivably then, we can study the influence and effects of neorealist theories of status, how they inform political practice, are contested and so on. Ultimately, although it need be central to the analysis, a TIS approach implies scholars pay attention to the role academia plays in reproducing or contesting the legitimacy of particular theories of status

Fifth and finally, future research could further develop the grammar of status framework I used to identify and analyse domestic policy processes. There is little reason to believe that my grammatical units exhausts the means through which activities are framed as a status competition, nor that the grammar cannot be refined. Moreover, future research could also develop a "grammar" of other types of status hierarchy: status clubs and hierarchies of domination. This dissertation focused on identifying how different theories of status *competition* were made and remade over time, and how these theories informed policy legitimation. Yet, leveraging the possibility of disagreement over the nature of the international hierarchy further than I have done here, a TIS approach could analyse how contestation cuts across types of hierarchy. For instance, Brexiteers often present the EU as prison (Daddow, 2019) – a metaphor of domination – while Europhiles tend to theorize the EU as a desirable status club. However, my suspicion is that TIS' pertaining to other types of hierarchies will be generally less contested at the domestic level because the process of ascertaining whether one is in a club or not, or the subject of domination or not, is less complex than theorizing where one stands in relative ranking among states. Yet ultimately, how much value there would be in using a TIS approach to investigate other types of hierarchy, is a matter for further research.

Further development of the grammar might prove fruitful because it could address a tacit eurocentrism in status scholarship. One specific advantage of my framework is that it can identify- "decode" the logic of status competition even when the words status or prestige are not used. This is a useful because of the prevalence of the norm against explicitly using status to legitimate policy (Sagan, 1997; Gilady, 2018, p.24). Because this norm is especially prevalent in "Western" countries, it seems to have deflected the gaze of status scholars onto

countries where stating explicit status goals is considered acceptable (BRICS).[379] Aiming to remedy this blind spot, my framework allows the analyst to identify the logic of status competition as it manifests in discourse even when it is superficially hidden from view: when "status" is not uttered explicitly. For instance, Chapter VI's inquiry into the SALT case, highlighted how the metaphor of "equality" – enabled various domestic actors to mobilise the grammar of status to legitimate their position and delegitimise alternatives. Similarly, at times Norway's pro-PISA discourse hid the logic of status competition beneath representations of value for money.

The Social Function of Ambiguity

Ambiguity and heterogeneity, not planning and self-interest,
are the raw materials of which powerful states and persons are constructed.

(Padgett and Ansell, 1993: 1259)

To conclude, I will draw out a crucial counter-intuitive policy implication of my research: ambiguity among states and publics is a social good to be cherished. Indeed, the cases provide preliminary evidence that suggests intersubjective agreement about the international hierarchy is an important condition that facilitates a state's willingness and ability to compete for international status and/or affect the rewards from competing. Put differently: Ambiguity around the hierarchy in a given domain hinders states ability to compete in zero-sum games for status. Status thus becomes the theoretical reason why ambiguity amongst policy makers has often been considered "constructive".

Indeed, across the cases, domestic agreement over TIS fostered status competition. For instance, in SALT the lack of agreement about the nature of the status hierarchy and the prizes on offer for "equality" of launchers, enabled Kissinger to negotiate a SALT I treaty in which the US accepted possessing fewer launchers than the USSR. However, over the course of SALT II the rules became clarified domestically that equality was essential, and this left the US obsessed with ensuring equality in number down to the last obsolete submarine.

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[379] Although western countries are not entirely missing from status scholarship, status has proven especially popular for understanding rising powers. This becomes borderline Eurocentric when status concerns in these countries are treated as irrational thereby reproducing orientalist tropes.

Meanwhile, in Norway, lack of agreement over the nature of the international education hierarchy enabled some to claim Norway was best, while others claimed opposite. The outcome was that attempts to reform based upon international advice were stymied. However, following the PISA status shock, agreement over the "rules of the game" emerged across parties that saw Norway exerting considerable effort to compete in the PISA rankings. However, in the last decade PISA's theory of international education status has become heavily contested, undermining the ability of parties to legitimate competing in PISA. Finally, during the Boer War, agreement at the domestic level about the impossibility of letting such a small adversary get away with an ultimatum, enabled Britain to compete –via war - to maintain its position. The rules of the game were remade domestically, if not internationally, such that celebration was in order upon victory in the conventional war. However, upon the final phase of the war a rival theory emerged to contest the status value of the war, one that undermined the governments legitimacy and the status value of winning.

Along with domestic ambiguity around the status hierarchies, status ambiguity among states was also latent even if it was not foregrounded in the analysis. While mainstream discourse in Britain saw their conventional victory as impressive, Mercer and the foreign reporting in the UK press suggest this was far from universal. However, this did not stop Brits inventing a new word for euphoria upon victory. Meanwhile, it seems highly unlikely that anyone other than Norwegians considered their education system the best in the world prior to PISA. Yet the lack of agreement about the hierarchy at an interstate level enabled this idea to persist and remain influential until PISA shocked Norway during the 2000s. Finally, the lack of agreement among the US and Russia about the nature of the nuclear status competition, seems to have allowed both sides to – temporarily - believe they had "won" the SALT I negotiations.

Thus, we have theoretical reasons and some provisional evidence to support the claim that the ability for states to legitimate competing in an international hierarchy is undermined by disagreement – ambiguity - about the rules of the game and the nature of the international hierarchy. Conversely, domestic agreement – clarity - about the nature of the international hierarchy facilitates competitive behaviour according to the rules of a given hierarchy. Thus. I argue that it is preliminary grounds to make the opposite claim to Wohlforth (2009): ambiguity mitigates and undermines the pressure to compete, and potentially allows one to generate internal rewards (pride and legitimacy) without succumbing to the sort of zero sum

competition commonly considered a pathology of status. If this is correct, what are the normative or policy implications?

<center><i>In Defence of Ambiguity</i></center>

Ambiguity bedevils international relations scholars. Indeed, striving to clarify the ambiguous is a major part of our fields *modus operendi*. Does nuclear deterrence work? What is the European Union? Supra-state, neo-medieval empire, normative power, or something else entirely? What is "the state" anyway? A collection of bureaucracies, an organism or bundle of sensory impressions? How can one recognize *recognition* itself? To be sure, these are all legitimate puzzles; ones IR has yet to solve. On the other hand, ontologically, IR scholars also see ambiguity in social life as a problem. Indeed, when not envying physics, we yearn to become more like economics (Hoffman, 2009, p.434). From Waltz' market metaphor, to the rational actor assumption embedded within all manner of IR "games", mainstream IR has imported economic theory *en masse*. Economics doxa has to a large extent become IR (mainstream) doxa. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that many IR scholars also share economics' tacit normative assumption that perfect information is a dream worth striving for. Economists assume that more information is always better than less: For perfect markets to function they require perfect information so people can efficiently select the product that will maximise their utility. Deviance from this impossible dream provides one common explanation for why markets seldom function like economist's models. Similarly, within mainstream IR, theories abound that blame misinformation, rhetoric, propaganda, misperception, for world politics many ills. The tacit assumption becomes that more and better information amongst actors and subjects would help international society avoid tension, war, and ultimately function smoother. Conversely, in the exception that proves the rule, Realists' pessimism about the possibility of acquiring perfect information (at least about the future) underpins what they (self-consciously) recognise as a *pessimistic* outlook on the prospects for peace in world politics. Again, lack of information and ambiguity is a curse. Thus, IR scholars typically see ambiguity as an epistemological challenge set by our objects of analysis, or an ontological pathology that causes problems for states.

Yet, security and economics are not the only interests in town. Social hierarchies also produce social pressures and social pleasures that do not operate according to the same logic. Accordingly, ambiguity in the social realm serves a different, oftentimes positive function. This dissertation suggests ambiguity may not be so bad after all. For social groups, and in

particular, the state, ambiguity about international hierarchies may enable states to keep their populations satisfied, reach international agreements, and may even help legitimate their existence. Further, ambiguity about status at the domestic level will make legitimating competing for status difficult. Indeed, my dissertation suggests that ambiguity about where peoples and their states stand in relation to one another often functions as a social blessing for states rather than a curse. Put theoretically, ambiguity around status helps international society avoid the frequent, costly and inefficient zero-sum game status competitions, where to move up another must move down. In short, ambiguity helps international *society* hang together with less friction and helps states *keep on keeping on* without their peoples discovering that they not special, nor recognized as special by their peers.

Ultimately, knowing where one stands may not be all it is cracked up to be. In fact, it might drive people to despair; individuals who are capable of accurately assessing their own abilities are prone to depression.[380] States, at least in this instance, are like people; we should be glad if they do not always agree on the terms by which they should be compared. Indeed, contra the axiom that perfect information and rule agreement is an ideal to strive for, socially it may prove a dystopia rather than a utopia.[381]

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[380] This is called "depressive realism" in psychology (Moore and Fresco, 2012).
[381] While Foucault's concern with the panopticon shares this unease with perfect information, his worry is with *control* and freedom, my argument concerns esteem and social wellbeing.

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